

# KISSES OF FATE

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E.HERON-ALLEN



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# KISSES OF FATE

*(A Study of mere Human Nature)*

EDWARD HERON-ALLEN

*It is Life's Law, that when Fate comes with kisses  
She gives them on the eyes, so blinding us ;  
And we look up again, but just in time  
To catch the glint o' th' blade she stabs us with,  
Not to prevent it——.*

—AMÉLIE RIVES.

CHICAGO, NEW YORK, AND SAN FRANCISCO  
BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.

1888

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Dedication

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In Memoriam

Gen. Res. Engl. 20 May 60 Whittomere  
20 Dec 60 Ashmore

TO THEE,—dear Friend of mine,—I dedicate  
This little Book that has been wholly Thine  
Since long before 'twas written, for these Tales  
Were told to Thee, invented for Thine ear  
Alone. If aught of Purity there be,  
Or any Truths be found, amid my Lines,  
'Tis Thine alone the Glory of their Good,  
For,—telling them, through the long Winter  
nights,—

I watched Thine Eyes, all-fearful lest a sign  
Of Thy Displeasure should shine out from them  
At aught I said. And when I took the Pen  
In hand to tell these Tales of mine once more,  
Mine only thought was of the moment when  
Thine Eyes should con my little Book and learn,  
—Taught by whatever Good there be in it,—  
That, writing it, I laboured but for Thee.

E. H-A.

*New York, 1887.*

TO THEE once more I dedicate these Tales  
Of mine,—more worthy now, since more complete ;  
And, blazoning anew Thy Name upon  
The fore-front of my Book, men's eyes to greet,  
I lay a perfect—yet imperfect—whole

At Thy dear feet.

Yet there are those who have declared it all  
Unworthy Thine acceptance.—Ah, my Sweet !  
Could I but make a Story worthy Thee,  
None then would dare my page to criticise,  
For then my Tale would be so pure, and free  
From any blemish,—ev'n in Thy dear eyes,—  
That none less lovely could condemn, nor see  
The merest shadow of a thought ill-said  
In all *Thy* book :—[for surely it would be  
Not mine, but Thine !]

E. H-A.

*New York*, 1888.

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## Foreword by Way of Explanation.

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At the moment that these sheets are ready to leave the printer's hands, I am told that my title, like that under which these stories were announced, and "Sylvester Gray" was published, requires a word of explanation.

A recent writer has said : "The roses fade fastest when the sun is brightest, and when, on returning to the garden at evening, we find their fallen petals strewn upon the ground, we shall be sorry that we did not gather more of them at midday." The fallen petals of the Roses that promised such a wealth of fragrance for the morrow—the broken promises of Youth which heralded such brilliancy in Age, may be called "The Kisses of Fate." The Love of To-day becomes too often the Memory—the Regret—of To-morrow. Happy the man who can say—"The Future for which I strove has become the Present in which I exult!"—to such this Cycle of Stories is not addressed, but to the infinitely larger section of humanity who have plucked the Dead-Sea Fruit of Hope.

The reader is referred to Mr. Edgar Saltus' "Philosophy of Disenchantment."

*EDWARD HERON-ALLEN,*

NEW YORK, U. S. A.

May, 1888.



"THE ARROW WHICH IS SHOT  
COMES NO<sup>T</sup> BACK."

*The worldly Hope men set their hearts upon  
Turns ASHES, or it prospers, and anon  
(Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty face),  
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone !*

*Ah ! Love, could You and I with Him conspire,  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things—entire.  
Would we not shatter it to bits, and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire ?*

—OMAR-i-KHAYYAM

## THE SUICIDE OF SYLVESTER GRAY.

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### PART I.

FALSE? Ah! no—hardly that. Dear heart, you are not to blame.

(Who carps at the sun, or the fleeting rain, or the transient evening dew?)

And I cavil not at your fair young soul that would fain—but could not—be true.

And I love you, aye, the same!

#### I.

WE were at Harrow together. I remember so well the first time I ever saw, or spoke to him! It seems like yester-year instead of a quarter of a century ago. The summer term of the year of grace 18— was two days old. For two days past the historic hill wheron “Lyon of Preston, yeoman John, full many a year ago,” built his school, had been alive with a merry swarm of boys ranging in age from fourteen years upwards, clad

in the jacket of the lower, or the swallow-tails of the upper school, and all hatted alike with the shallow, broad-brimmed straw, kept securely in its place by an elastic behind the head,—the whole constituting the quaint costume in which the authorities and scholars of Harrow-on-the-Hill see nothing ridiculous. The whole place seemed to laugh, as it always did in the early days of a new term, as if amused at its sudden awakening from the quiet weeks of the holidays; and the heat of the young spring sun striking the red brick of the old schools, of the Fourth Form Room, where malefactors received condign punishment, and of “Speaker” (the new speech-room had not then been built), was reflected upon the asphalt of the “school-yard,” causing it to bubble up and stick to the feet of the enthusiasts who followed one another in a long *queue*, bowling “yard-balls” at some champion of the school-yard cricket wicket.

I had walked up the hill, past “Sam’s,” to the school-yard, with my hands in my pockets



—a Harrow boy never under any circumstances takes his hands out of his pockets ;—I had read the first notice-slips of the term fluttering upon the notice-board at the gates; had peered into the cloisters under the old speech-room, and had wandered away to the low wall at the top of the steps leading to the gymnasium, leaning upon which one looks over the disused “Milling-ground” and the racquet-courts, and away, away, away over the fields, past Harrow Weald to Pinner, and Oxhey, and Bushey, and Watford, twenty miles into the blue distance towards great cities in which many of us were destined to play our parts in the drama of life, and towards vast oceans which we should many of us cross before long in search of wealth and fame. And whilst I leaned upon the wall and fidgeted with the leaves that peeped inquisitively over the coping, deliberating whether it was worth while to walk down the steps to the gymnasium or no, I became aware of the presence, a few paces distant, of a small boy.

When I say a "small boy" I do not mean that his stature was less than mine; he was about my height. Nor do I mean that he was younger than I; indeed, I subsequently knew that we were of an equal age. I say a "small" boy because I had been a "Harrovian" for two terms already, and felt a veteran—and a gigantic one to boot—by the side of the "new fellow" who stood at my side. He was of the ordinary height of a boy of his age, neither stunted nor run to seed, as is so frequently the case among school-boys of fourteen. Boy as he was, I remember that he was beautifully made, thin in the flank, deep in the chest, flat in the back, and straight and erect from the lines of the legs to the carriage of the head. He was very decidedly a juvenile "swell." His clothes fitted him with a perfection rare among children at the age when they "grow visibly;" they were cut after the latest fashion for boys; and I remember that I, who was always an outrageously slovenly person, felt for his attire a mixture of envy

and contempt; but his face conquered me—it was beautiful. His broad, white forehead and deep, violet eyes were thrown into shadow by the broad brim of his Harrow hat, from beneath which there escaped the wavy masses of his hair, whose glossy blackness had a tinge of deep purple brown in it which gave to it an effect of wonderful warmth and life. A straight, Greek nose and finely-cut mouth completed the face, which was of a yellowish delicate tint—a perfect “*blanc mat*” complexion. Young as I was, I was charmed by this juvenile Adonis; and edging along the low, red-brick wall so as to get close up to him, I said:

“Are you a new fellow?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your name?”

“Sylvester Gray.”

“Sylvester Gray,” thought I, “what a delightful name!” All my life I had longed for such an one, and had envied the “Ronceval de Courcy’s,” the “Plantagenet Fitzjames’s,” and the other high-sounding sponsorials and

patronymics owned by the heroes of inexpensive fiction. My father's name was Tompkins, and my godfathers and godmothers in my baptism had prefixed thereto the unassuming prenomens of "John," an insult which I felt that death alone—my death—could wipe out. I hold firmly to a theory that a man is heavily handicapped, as regards his individuality, by his christian name. Thus, all the Toms I have known have been good-natured, and rather commonplace. All the Charlies have been delightful "bad lots," all the Freds have been rowdy, all the Georges practical, all the Franks prigs, all the Archies good, all the Edwards artistic, and so on. Therefore, to give a boy one of these characteristic names weights him from the start with a certain prescribed individuality. But call a boy Sylvester, or some name of that kind, he has the chance of moulding himself on an unique pattern;—and his mother has a chance of helping him.

Thus everything about him, save the fact that he had taken on entering the school a



form above the one I had reached after two terms' work, attracted me to Sylvester Gray ; and just as the most dissimilar persons often voluntarily cast in their lots in life together, so Sylvester and I swore an eternal friendship in the old school-yard on this sunny afternoon, and strolled off, arm-in-arm, down the zig-zag pathway of our lives.

Nobody liked me when I was a boy ; and looking back at myself after the lapse of never-mind-how-many years, I am really not surprised. In the first place, I was very ugly, and that makes a great deal of difference in the life of a boy ; secondly, I was rather a fiend ; I was quiet, morose, taciturn ; I hated people of my own age, and got on much better with the masters than with the fellows at school. I didn't care about games. The hideous combination of colors worn by the Football Team had no attraction for me ; the dark-colored hat of the Cricket Eleven, the badge of the Rifle Team, and the certificate of gymnastic proficiency were not, for me, objects of envy. On half-

holidays I preferred the cool and quiet of the Vaughan library to the tumult of the cricket-fields and the racquet-courts, or better still—as I could always get a master to “sign me for bill” (i. e., to excuse my attendance at the four o’clock calling-over of the school-list), I loved to wander far afield, to Pinner, and Oxhey, and Sudbury, and Wembley, to Stanmore and Elstree, in search of flowers and ferns, and butterflies, and solitude; and oftentimes Sylvester Gray would give up the joys of the courts and playing-fields, where he soon became a welcome *habitué*, to accompany me, and then we would talk of home, and of the past and the future.

I was to be a doctor, like my father before me. Sylvester was the orphan son of an officer, who had been an old Harrovian, and who had fallen for his queen and country at Balaclava. I remember Sylvester Gray bursting into tears one day in the school-chapel, as, for the first time, he read his father’s name on the tablets in the south aisle, erected in commemoration of the Harrow boys who had fallen in the

Crimea. His future would be one of dignified ease, and his mind was divided between going into the army, on the one hand, and being called to the bar and then spending his life travelling about and seeing the world, on the other.

Bright hopes! Happy future! Sylvester Gray killed himself one warm spring night in Rome, when he was only thirty; and I alone, of his countless friends, have ever known the sequence of events that led to this catastrophe, which has been one of the profoundest sorrows of my life.

## II.

SYLVESTER GRAY and I began at Harrow a friendship that lasted all his life. He became, at school, the periodical companion of my youthful solitude, and took a kind of half-timorous, half-contemptuous interest in my scientific and quasi-scientific manias. He would sit in the reclining-chair in my room, his hands nervously grasping its arms, and watch me with grave, deep eyes whilst I mixed

strange chemicals in a glass mortar or graduated measure, preparatory to the production of some perfume or explosion, destined to surpass all previous efforts in virulence and destructiveness. He would take a queer, puzzled pleasure in looking over my butterflies and dried flowers. He would even bring himself to poke my imprisoned snakes, through the bars of their cage, with a penholder; and, as a result, I confess that, over and above my personal adoration of him, I was flattered by his interest in my pursuits, for he was popular and "a swell" in the school, whilst I was distinctly the reverse. After school hours it was, as I have said, far more delightful for me to hide myself in the Vaughan library, or in my own room, to explore the mysteries of Rees' Encyclopædia, or to concoct the experiments aforesaid, than to mix with my fellow-creatures; and this kind of thing does not tend to increase a fellow's popularity, even if he *is* a member of the Upper School, ready to give "cons" (Anglice: translations) to indolent athletes of

the Shells and Fourth Form ; and such appreciation of my schoolfellows as I enjoyed at Harrow was due practically in its entirety to the efforts of Sylvester.

He would carry about in his pockets, and exhibit, the successful results of my more showy experiments ; he would appeal to me as to an authority on matters recondite and abstruse, and would ask my advice on any matters deeper than the ordinary problems of a schoolboy's existence, that might arise in conversation with "his set"; and in this way I became an object of a certain respect, and went through life rejoicing in the nickname of "Professor." I was naturally impressed with a kind of gratitude—the gratitude of the physically superior "beast," for the fragile but more popular "beauty," and I did my best to share such joys as life possessed for me with young Gray, whom I was inclined to envy and admire in a public, and patronize in a private, capacity.

I have said that I was more popular with the masters than with the fellows. I had al-

so many acquaintances among the residents of Harrow, whom I had met at the masters' houses, and none were greater friends of mine than the Woosters. In my first conversation with Mrs. Wooster I found that we were in some abstruse way connected with one another ; and whether it was that I adored Mrs. Wooster, or whether it was that I loved to sit and talk to her golden-haired daughter Evelyn, I used to look forward with the liveliest anticipation to tea-time on Thursdays, when, as a regular thing, I used to find my way to their pretty little house, which looked out over the southern slope of the hill towards Edgware and London.

I made their acquaintance during my second term at Harrow, and never knew till many years afterwards why, after my last term at school, our friendship cooled off, and practically ceased. It is a terrible story, I am afraid, but it is very necessary to the development of this narrative that I should sketch in the main outlines, which outlines it is equally necessary that I should leave my readers to fill in.

When first I knew her, Evelyn Wooster was a blue-eyed child of fourteen, rather old for her age, as only-children are apt to be, with a glory of sunny hair that fell in a tangled mass far below her waist; and I suppose she holds in my life the elevated position of my first love. That she should care about *me* was, I knew, a ridiculous idea; but the joy of finding a white example of the *fritillaria meleagris* in a field near Pinner, and the delight of catching a humming-bird hawk-moth on the terrace behind the Chapel and the Vaughan, were increased a thousand-fold by her appreciation of my *trouvailles*, and by her borrowing them for a week to show to her "greatest girl-friend" (how my heart leapt at that qualification, "girl-friend"), and by her repeated subsequent allusions to these feats of prowess in the collecting line. But I never felt so proud of any specimen that I had submitted to her for inspection and approval as I did of Sylvester Gray, whom I took up there to tea one sunny afternoon of his first term at Harrow.



He cut me out completely. When it was a question of what has been justly called the softer, and unjustly the weaker, sex, he always cut everybody out. But I did not mind; I never thought anything could be too good for either him or her, and I gave them to one another without a murmur, and was quite content to sit and talk to Mrs. Wooster, or help her to tend her flowers, whilst Sylvester and Evelyn sat together and talked on the verandah that ran round the house, or, in winter, at the piano in their cosy little drawing-room.

And so the best part of five years crept by. It was our last term at Harrow. We were both in the Sixth Form, and I was a monitor. Sylvester wasn't, but he was in the Cricket Eleven and the Shooting Team, and he played racquets for the school, and helped us materially to beat Eton at Lord's cricket ground, and to win the Ashburton Shield and the Racquet Cup at Wimbledon and Prince's. Evelyn Wooster was a lovely young woman of eighteen, and she and Sylvester Gray were



reciprocally "hard hit." Well, well! he was eminently "eligible," and my nineteen-year-old experience enabled me to detect a distinct satisfaction in the glances which Mrs. Wooster occasionally directed at the handsome pair, whilst we—she and I—walked about the garden as we had done for four years past, and talked horticulture and home.

I? Ah, what of that? So long as Sylvester and Evelyn were happy, what did *my* feelings on the subject matter? Nothing to anybody but myself, did they? Very well, then! They are both dead now, and I am still a miserable, buttonless bachelor!

Nearly five years! And during that time we had seen a good deal of one another—Sylvester, Evelyn, and I. Sylvester had been a beautiful boy—now he was a superlatively handsome young man. A silky, sable moustache decorated his upper lip, and his whole bearing was full of that graceful strength which signalizes the healthy, pure-bred gentleman. The more hypercritical used to object that his face was somewhat too delicately

formed; that it was too womanish in the softness of its outlines, with its languorous violet eyes and long lashes. To me, as to all men who were not envious, he was always an object of unquestioning admiration; whilst among women he was always a kind of Admirable Crichton. Almost without exception they fell in love with him, and he would accept their homage quite as though it were a matter of course. “*Entre deux amants, il y a toujours l’un qui baise et l’autre qui tend la joue;*” and Sylvester was always the one “*qui tendait la joue.*” The only woman I ever knew him to worry himself about was Evelyn Wooster, and her he simply adored.

His friendship for the Woosters had communicated itself to his sole relations, an aunt and a sister, who lived in a beautiful old Tudor mansion belonging to Sylvester by inheritance, near Staplehurst, in the County of Kent. During the summer of the year 18— Mrs. Wooster, Evelyn, and I were all spending a few weeks with them at his beautiful old home before we should severally part to

pursue our ways along the different paths marked out for us in life. Sylvester and I had left Harrow a few weeks before, and on the last Thursday before the school broke up we had met as usual at the little cottage on the hill; and, as it had been a rather affecting little meeting, we had to get up our spirits by projecting this visit to Idlesse—such was the old-world name of Sylvester's Kentish home.

I had been there more than once during the five years of our school days, but I thought it had never looked so pretty as it did when, at the close of a summer afternoon, I drove up to the house through the winding grounds that hid it from the Staplehurst road, and saw it bathed in the splendour of an August sunset, with Sylvester, in the most *négligé* of attitudes and costumes, and Evelyn, in the freshest and prettiest of frocks, standing in the porch to welcome me. Sylvester's fox terrier, who sat in front of them, making good practice at the flies that investigated him—a grave dog, who rejoiced in the fas-

cinating name of "Mr. Smith"—gave me one searching glance to satisfy himself of my identity, and then went into hysterics over me as I sprang from the dog-cart. The air was heavy with the perfume of the evening primroses that grew round the porch, and the Maréchale Niel roses that straggled all over it; and as I shook Sylvester and Evelyn by the hand I was overwhelmed by a sensation which I could not understand at the time, but which, looking back at that August evening, I know now was simply pure happiness.

Then there followed three perfect weeks spent among the orchards and the hop-gardens of the neighborhood. The five years that had passed since my story had opened had not altered my disposition very materially, and I was still disposed to be quiet. Besides, I had my preliminary medical examination to look forward to; and with the enthusiasm that we all of us feel, when first we leave school, to reach as quickly as possible the dignity of a "profes-

sion," I had brought down with me some of my bran-new medical books to read up. They were not much read, but they lay about a good deal, and when one day Sylvester's aunt looked into one of them and nearly frightened herself into fits, I felt that the troubles of transportation were, in a measure, compensated for. At any rate, I studied botany with Sybil Gray, Sylvester's pretty sister, and really we gathered a lot of flowers together, and I dried some of them—that *she* found; but when I congratulated her, and indirectly myself, on the progress of our botanical studies, it was horrid of her to ask me what were the toxicological properties of Maréchale Niel roses, and what was the active alkaloid principle of the forget-me-not.

Meanwhile Sylvester and Evelyn lived in a fool's paradise of their own. They disappeared usually after breakfast, and turned up at lunch, with an appearance of unconscious virtue, to talk volubly of plans for the afternoon, embracing the entire party. After

lunch they disappeared again, to return in time to dress for dinner, looking supremely foolish, but assuring us all that they had not been outside the grounds, and—Heaven forgive them!—that they had been looking for us everywhere. We used to laugh at them—it was “an understood thing”—but they were both young enough in all conscience. The future before them was as bright as it was long. Sometimes Sylvester would allude to it vaguely in the smoking-room before we went to bed. What a future it would be!

Well, well! She died long ago, and Sylvester Gray killed himself in Rome ten years later. Ah—yi!

### III.

THE three weeks ran by like a summer afternoon. The Woosters were to leave in two days, and Evelyn and Sylvester seemed to forget that we others even existed. They ran about together, or walked up and down the terrace arm-in-arm nearly all the time.

The last but one was one of those frightfully hot days that we have sometimes in England at the end of August. It had been sultry and oppressive since early morning; the lovers had been away all day, wandering in the woods at the back of the house, and had arrived home at tea-time, flushed, silent, pre-occupied, it seemed to me. During the interval before dinner and during the meal they scarcely took their eyes off one another, and I confess that their silent, constrained manner gave me an undefined sensation of uneasiness, which I could not have accounted for even to myself.

After dinner we—that is, Sybil and I, and Evelyn and Sylvester—went out on to the terrace, and wandered up and down in the stifling heat, which even the dew had been powerless to moderate. At intervals we would stop and stand at the terrace wall to watch the summer lightning in the horizon—lightning which was almost incessant, and more vivid than I ever remember to have seen it before or since. Sybil and I kept up

a continual chatter, as we always did ; but the other two were strangely silent, and would stand for ten minutes at a time against the wall, looking into the distance without saying a word, their fingers closely intertwined as their hands hung listlessly by their sides. There was, after all, something peculiarly unrefreshing in the air of this summer night, and presently, Evelyn's white frock having turned a corner at the end of the terrace and disappeared in the direction of the rose garden, Sybil and I turned to enter the house. As we did so she turned to me suddenly, and said :

“Jack, I don't know why, but I feel so uneasy about those two. It's a dreadful idea to have, but you have been our best friend for so long that you're the only person I can talk to about it. Sylvester is so impulsive and wild-hearted, and Evelyn adores him so absolutely, that I'm dreadfully frightened. Do go down to the rosery and tell them to come in and have some music.”

She had noticed it too ! I walked rapidly



down the gravelled terrace, and turned off on to the soft grass walks of the rose garden. I could not see the lovers anywhere, and started to walk rapidly round the beds in search of them. I found them suddenly—too suddenly—as I turned a corner, beneath a trellised archway. They were standing motionless, locked in one another's arms. Her head lay upon his shoulder, and she seemed to have lost consciousness of the whole world beneath the spell of his kiss. I sprang back and retraced my steps some twenty yards, and then advanced once more, whistling to apprise them of my approach. They turned the corner arm-in-arm and advanced to meet me. I delivered my message, and we regained the house in silence.

The ladies retired early, and as Sylvester did not want to smoke, we went to our rooms also. I looked in on Sylvester on my way to mine, and talked with him for a few minutes—no longer, for he evidently did not want me to remain. His face was whiter than usual, but his hand, as we said “Good-

night," was burning hot. I looked into his eyes, and said :

"Syl, old fellow, there's something wrong. What is it?"

"Wrong!" he exclaimed, "wrong! How can anything be wrong with a man who is loved as I am, and by such a woman? Why Jack, old man, I am so deliriously happy that I don't know what to do. We love one another so passionately that it is almost more than we can bear. Don't be uneasy on my account; if anything is wrong it is a case of extremes meeting, of my being so happy that I don't know what to do with myself."

"Sylvester," I cried, "for God's sake, take care! You are not going to marry for a couple of years at least. Is it right for you two to be so much alone together as you have been?—to separate yourselves so entirely from the world as you do? Surely not."

"My dear Jack, don't worry yourself about me—or us; we can take care of ourselves. And now—good-night!"

And with that I left him.

\* \* \* \* \*

What a night it was! I felt suffocated, though I had opened all my windows. At last I got up and opened my door, and, cooled a little by the draught, fell into an uneasy slumber. Suddenly I woke. Surely I heard a footstep passing my open door—a stealthy, gliding footstep, like that of a robber; and the idea of burglars instantly occurred to my city-bred mind, as I thought of the massive Queen Anne plate which lay about on the sideboard in the dining-room, day and night. I lay still for a few moments, and then quietly rising and putting on a dressing-gown, felt my way down the corridor to Sylvester's room. The moon had hidden herself behind a cloud, and it was pitch dark. As I crept along, the clock in the hall struck half past two; I turned the handle of Sylvester's door, and went in.

He was out of bed, standing at the window, also in a dressing-gown. He turned upon me and said, in a voice which seemed

to me to be choking with suppressed fury :  
“In God’s name, what are you prowling about the place for ?”

“Sylvester,” I replied, “I heard footsteps in the house, and thought you were being robbed, and might not have been wakened up. I see you were, though. Is everything all right ?”

His face was in the shadow, but his voice was natural again as he replied,

“Yes, yes, all right ! I heard footsteps myself, or fancied I did, and went out to investigate. I found everything safe ; if I hadn’t I should have come to rouse you. It was probably me that you heard coming back to my room.”

Undoubtedly that was it. I regained my room and went back to bed to fall into a feverish, confused sleep, in which I dreamed a ghastly dream, wherein Sylvester and Evelyn were engaged struggling with a loathsome monster, which crushed her in its iron jaws, despite the efforts of Sylvester to save her, whilst I was paralyzed a few

paces off, powerless to raise a finger in his assistance. When I awoke it was broad daylight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Evelyn did not come down to breakfast. Mrs. Wooster said that her daughter had passed a bad night and was feverish; the frightful heat of the day before had been too much for her. Sylvester was in despair; it seemed so hard that she should be unwell her last day at Idlesse, and after breakfast he fidgeted around the house waiting for her to come down. We were sitting together on the terrace when she made her appearance at the drawing-room window, looking very pale and fragile in her white morning-wrapper. We rose to go to her at once, and it seemed to me that there was something singularly subdued in her manner as she answered our anxious enquiries. She was still suffering a little; she had a headache, and was generally not "up to the mark;" but she had made a point of coming down for her last day in the country.

I left them together and trotted off to find Sybil and Mrs. Wooster, and the two lovers spent the morning together as usual. I saw them walking up and down the terrace, always in sight of the house, and from the gravity with which they conversed I knew that the all-important "future" was the subject of their conversation. Lunch was rather a silent meal—the last meals together of a country-house party are always rather dismal functions, I think—and after lunch we all sat together on the grass in the rose-garden, and read and talked quietly.

Evelyn had recovered from her indisposition entirely, and was the most chirpy of us all; Sylvester, on the other hand, seemed, as the Americans say, "all broken up" by his impending separation, and hardly opened his lips, or took his eyes off Evelyn's face. It made me unhappy to see him suffer so, and I made many efforts to leave them together, which Evelyn, for some reason or other, quietly frustrated.

They disappeared after dinner, however,

“to say good-bye with variations,” as Sybil said laughingly. She and I went down the terrace and sat on the rustic seat at the end, and were mildly sentimental, when she gave me a dreadful fright. I had taken her hand in mine, and was playing with her fingers, when suddenly I said to her: “What fun it would be if you and I were to fall as badly in love with one another as those two simple things walking up and down there.”

She shuddered, and said in the most terror-stricken voice I have ever heard,

“Oh Jack, Jack! Don’t think me an utter fool, but unless I tell somebody I shall die, I think. I’m so awfully frightened about Syl and Eva; they’ve had a quarrel or something, and whenever I look at her, though she’s just the same as she always was, I’ve the most dreadful feeling here;” and she pressed her left hand to her throat. The one I held trembled violently.

A kind of pall seemed to fall over the whole world. An icy feeling of horror crept over me, Heaven only knows why, for, after

all, what is there so serious about a lover's tiff? I rose and said :

“It's getting chilly, Syb ; let's go in.”

As we passed them on the terrace, they were walking silently side-by-side. He was playing with his moustache, and she had her eyes fixed on the gravel in front of her.

That night, in the smoking-room, I said to Sylvester: “Have you and Eva had a row?”

“Good gracious, no! What an idea! We're the best friends in the world. I am awfully sorry they're leaving to-morrow. The place will seem so dull by comparison for Auntie and Sybil when we're all gone.”

“All gone? How do you mean? You are not going away, are you?”

“Why, haven't I told you?” said he; “I'm going to Bellagio next week, and then I shall spend the winter in Rome, *en route*, as it were, for Constantinople and the East. I've always wanted to travel, and I think a couple of years of it will amuse me.”

“And then you'll return and marry Eva, I suppose.”



"I don't know ; I hope so. For God's sake don't talk to me about it, old man ; I can't bear it."

The same feeling of horror took possession of me again, and we said little more before we took our candles and made our way upstairs to bed.

The Woosters left next morning by the ten o'clock train from Staplehurst. The carriage which took them took my luggage to the station, and in the cool of the afternoon Sylvester and I walked over, that I might take the 6.30 train to town. We talked by the way of indifferent matters. He never mentioned the Woosters, and it was only when we were at the station, waiting for the train, that he referred to his own approaching departure. The train was in sight when I said to him :

"I can't see why you, who have all that can make life lovely here in England, should go and bury yourself in Palestine, and Syria, and Persia."

"Can't you ?" he replied, in a dry, cut voice ; "then I'll tell you. I am going away

because I'm not fit to remain with decent people. I'm a thing so loathsome, so contemptible, that I shudder at the sight of myself in a looking-glass. You say I'm rich. Well, my money has been my curse. Good-looking? Yes. The beauty of some painted, venomous insect, which an humanitarian would crush beneath his heel! Don't pity me, old fellow; I deserve all my misery; and I *am* miserable, God knows! Good-bye, Jack! When we meet again I shall feel better, I hope."

The guard whistled, and the train bore me away. "Goodness me!" thought I; "he has indeed had a tiff with Eva. Just fancy the *debonnair* Sylvester taking anything so to heart, and admitting that he is in the wrong."

And so I reached London, and Guy's Hospital, and the College of Surgeons, and my work; and my life became full of distractions. But I often wondered what Sylvester could have said to Eva that had made such a breach between them, and had produced such an effect upon one of them at least.

## PART II.

## I.

ELEVEN years have passed, and the scene has changed. The lives of the actors in the drama, of which we have read the prologue, have developed with the years ; people have married and died, and we two, Sylvester Gray and I, have remained. I have been sufficiently attached to my profession to succeed in it, and John Tompkins, M.D., has become one of the fortunate medicos who can afford to take a well-earned holiday after ten years of hard work. He is taking it at the moment when his story reopens.

I was in Rome, and it was the spring of the year of grace, 18—. In the autumn of the year before, having returned to Park Lane from a medical Congress held at Vienna, I was busily engaged re-writing the concluding chapters of my work upon the Conario-hypo-

physial tract, when, one day, meeting an old friend in the park, I could not for the life of me remember his name. An hour later I had to look in my address-book for the direction of a letter to an old patient, and that evening I fell fast asleep over my manuscript. I was a little alarmed, but fought against my fears, until one day, in the middle of a lecture at St. Augustine's Hospital, I suddenly found that my mind was a blank, and pleading illness, had been obliged to dismiss the students and leave the lecture-theatre. Dr. George Ayers, the principal consulting physician to the hospital, sent for me in the afternoon, and after a few questions said to me :

“Tompkins, you're overdoing it ; you're playing the fool with yourself, and this hospital can't afford it. If you belonged to Guy's or St. Bartholomew's I shouldn't have the least objection to your killing yourself, but you're on my staff, and I can't allow it. You will finish the notes for your new book, and you will cart them off to Rome with you ; you will return here in April next, and be-

tween this and then I forbid you officially to do any other work."

And so, after a short discussion, it was decided; and the end of November saw me installed in the prettiest of rooms in the *Tempietta*, at the top of the steps of the *Trinità de Monti*. From my windows I looked down upon the *Piazza di Spagna* and the steps of the *Trinità*, where artists' models do congregate. A little further on I caught a glimpse of the *Piazza*, and the *Porta del Popolo*, with the *Borghese* and the *Monte Parioli* beyond them, and beyond that, the *Campagna* and the yellow *Tiber* stretching to the sea.

I am of opinion that my rooms commanded the most beautiful view in Rome, and in this opinion the majority of my acquaintances, who climbed the *Via Sistina* to call upon me, cordially agreed.

So much for myself. What about the others? *Sylvester Gray* seemed absolutely to have disappeared out of my life. I heard sometimes from his sister, who seldom knew

anything definite about his movements, and I kept up a desultory correspondence with Mrs. Wooster. About two years after our last meeting at Idlesse, Evelyn, to our intense astonishment, married a commonplace young man, a local lawyer of Harrow; and a year after died in childbirth. I went down to see her grief-stricken mother, but could learn but little from her. From the day that Evelyn had parted from Sylvester Gray she had never mentioned his name of her own accord, and she had never prolonged any conversation of which Mrs. Wooster made him the subject. Her mother had never penetrated the mystery that shrouded their estrangement. All that Evelyn had said was that they quite understood one another, and that she had quite made up her mind that it would be a grave mistake for them to marry one another. A few days after they had left Idlesse, Sylvester had written her a long, imploring letter, begging her to reconsider her decision, and this letter Mrs. Wooster had only found after Evelyn's death.

What her answer had been, if she had ever answered it, her mother did not know.

That was all.

Of Sylvester himself our news was scanty and vague. I heard from him once, about six months after he left England. He wrote from Constantinople, and sent me his will to take care of, preparatory to his departure for Syria, Palestine, and Persia ; and in the letter that accompanied the document he told me that he might not return for a long, long time. From his bankers I heard that he had communicated with them from Jerusalem and from Mecca, and this was all we heard of him for five years. At the end of that time I came across him suddenly in the court-yard of the Hotel Continental in Paris.

I was sitting, wondering vaguely whether the indigenous Parisian could find anything interesting in the pages of "*La Vie Parisienne*," when the quiet, musical voice I knew so well said suddenly behind me,

"Tompkins, if I mistake not ! How are you ?"

I started to my feet as if I had been electrified—to find the old Sylvester standing at my side, holding out his hand with an amused look on his handsome face. It was undoubtedly the same old Sylvester, looking not a day older than he had looked the afternoon I shook him by the hand for the last time at Staplehurst station. He was as calm and quiet as he always had been, a little harder, perhaps, in his manner, and tanned to a rich olive pallor that made him, if possible, handsomer than ever ; but beyond that, absolutely unchanged.

He sat down by my side and gave me a short outline of his doings. He had spent the winter of 18— in Rome, as he had intended, and had gone to Istamboul in the spring ; there he had studied the languages and customs of the East, and had set out on a comprehensive tour of the Orient. He had joined a caravan, and in the guise of a “renegade” had performed as much of the Hadjj Pilgrimage to Mecca as a renegade is ever allowed to perform. He had wandered



through the Holy Land to Damascus, and had spent rich, lazy months in the hanging-gardens of Baghdad. He had lived the luxurious life of an Eastern Pacha, and had made himself familiar with Asia Minor; he knew Samsoun and Sinope and Batoum and Erzeroum and Kars as well as he knew London or Paris or Rome, and had he taken any interest in anything so dry as politics he would have been an authority on the Eastern Question.

From there he had traversed the deserts of Persia, and had been a familiar figure in the streets of Teheran and Ispahan. From his button-hole hung a little bunch of microscopic decorations, among which I could distinguish the Annunziata, the San Lazaro, the Redeemer of Greece, the Medjidieh, the Osmanieh, and the Portrait of the Shah. In a word, Sylvester Gray had become the most fascinatingly interesting and accomplished vagabond in Europe. He spoke of his wanderings with the *insouciance* of a gypsy. He looked upon our meeting as a matter of

course, though he had only arrived in Paris by the Orient Express three days before. He had no plans in particular—he never had; he would probably remain in Paris a few weeks and then return to London. He was not in a particular hurry to go anywhere or to do anything.

I spoke to him of England, and he looked bored; of Idlesse, and he changed the subject. He had heard of his aunt's death, and of his sister's marriage; he had sent her from Smyrna a bale of Oriental curiosities worth many thousands of piastres; he had heard of Evelyn's marriage and death, which he regretted sincerely but conventionally. He had but one object in life—to amuse himself; and his efforts in that direction met, apparently, with the completest success; and I congratulated him upon the attainment of his desires and his freedom from care. As I did so, a queer, cynical look came into his face, and he said, in his soft, languorous voice:

“ You congratulate me, old fellow?—envy me, perhaps? Don't do it. Don't do it. I've

got everything a man can want on the material plane; everyone I come across wishes he were me, whilst I!—do you see that young mechanic, standing looking in on this courtyard, with his honest face and careless eyes?—I'd give twenty years of my life and my right hand to change places with him. Hush! no answer required! What are you doing to-night? Dine with me at the Café Anglais, and we'll go to the Princesse de Cziquemine's together afterwards. I'll take you; she is one of my greatest friends. I helped her to buy some embroideries for less than ten times their value in the Bezesten at Istamboul two years ago."

And so, during the fortnight that I remained in Paris, I saw a good deal of Sylvester Gray, and had ample opportunities of studying the life he led. What a life it was! Never was there such a butterfly in this world; he was here, there, and everywhere. Everyone, save only the married man, was in love with him; his approval was the hallmark of excellence, whether it were stamped

upon a horse, a cravat, or a woman. At receptions he might always be found in the nookiest nook available, with the most beautiful woman in the room ; and the stories of Sylvester's *affaires* and of his *belles fortunes*, of his prowess in the Camp of Mars and the Court of Venus, were, as the sand on the sea-shore, innumerable.

" *Quel garçon !*" said the old men. " *Quel pschutt !*" said the young ones. " *Quel adorable enfant !*" said the young women. " *Quel frileux !*" said the old ones. " *Quel brute !*" said the husbands ; but these last kept their opinions to themselves.

" One of these days," said I to him, " you'll burn your fingers, and fall in love or get into trouble."

" The good Lord forbid !" he replied, with holy fervour. " My mental fingers are made of asbestos ; I haven't the capacity to fall in love, and I can't get into trouble because my memory is good and I keep my wits about me. *Vogue la galère !*" and he skipped off to keep some assignation or other, croodling a fragment

of some song of the Ambassadeurs, some echo of the Éden or of the Folies Bergères.

There was no doubt about the fact that he led a gay life of it. He was the veriest Bohemian that ever walked this earth, and a Bohemian of the best sort. He never drank, or gambled, or affected any of the lower vices of the Quartier Latin ; and whilst he was a little tin god on wheels in the Faubourg and the Champs Élysées, he was adored by hordes of impecunious artists whom he mainly supported by his purchases of works of art that he did not want, and by other delicate and indirect forms of a practically boundless charity.

My time was up, and I returned to London. Sylvester Gray saw me off at the Gare du Nord, and we made an appointment to meet again at my rooms in Park Street before the London season should have come to its timely end.

## II.

SYLVESTER GRAY came to London, and his rooms in Jermyn Street, St. James, were the

envy of half the men in town. A man more eminently "clubable" never looked out of a bay-window in Piccadilly; a man more eminently companionable never walked down "the Row" with "the beauty of the year;" a more charming conversationalist never suffered from an *embarras de choix* among his invitations to the smartest dinners in town, or to the most delightful country-houses in the kingdom. It therefore caused me the same sort of feeling of appreciation as I had experienced when he "took me up" at Harrow, to know that, with a fortnight's previous notice, I could always count upon him to dine with me, either *tête-à-tête* or otherwise.

He took an intense interest in a little book I was preparing at the time, a "Practical Handbook of the Vegetable Poisons"; and his intimate knowledge of Oriental toxicology was often of the greatest service to me in making my notes and experiments upon the lesser known Oriental alkaloids. His love for abstruse information of this kind, and his store thereof, were infinite and extraordinary.

He had brought with him from the East a collection of drugs and plants that he had made over there with a view to giving them to me ; and their value, with his notes upon them, was, to me, inestimable ; and he often startled me with the Borgia-like *nonchalance* with which he would discuss the effects of, and experiment on himself with, the most deadly drugs.

He would sit with me far into the early hours of the morning, working with me at my manuscripts and my analyses ; and the *Medical Times*, in subsequently reviewing my book, remarked that " Dr. Tompkins's data upon Asiatic drugs are the most minute and valuable to be found in medical literature." But he never referred to the past. It was only after our companionship had lasted thus for a couple of years that one day, our conversation having turned upon conscience and remorse and so on, he startled me again by suddenly saying :

" I tell you, Jack, now, as I told you when we first met in Paris, I hardly ever see an

artizan or a careless clerk strolling in the park on Sunday but I envy him with my whole soul. You are quite right when you say that nobody knows anything about my past life, either in England or abroad. Well, old man, I'll tell you this. There *is* something in my life so horrible to remember, that it clouds my enjoyment of every moment of my existence. I *can't* tell you what it is, but it closes the doors of happiness upon me, and I can never hope to offer a thing so vile as myself to any woman who may honor me with her love. No matter where the events to which I refer took place, whether here or abroad, whether in the east or in the west ! They hang like a pall over my whole existence, and not only do they prevent my allowing myself to lay my worship at the feet of a pure woman, not only do they condemn me to fritter away the sterling coinage of my love in the small change of flirtation, as somebody says in a play somewhere, but my past horror has actually rendered me incapable of loving. I shudder at the very



thought of a deep passion ; my heart is dry and sterile, and no woman may ever quicken it into life by the magic of her touch."

" But, my dear Syl, this is dreadful. I guessed that there might be something of this sort on your mind ; now I am a medical man, and though a young one, I am admitted to have had some experience with mental troubles—can't you bring yourself to tell any one about it? Surely it would ease your mind."

" No," he replied, " it is at the same time my curse and my safeguard. If ever, by any horrible chance, I *should* fall really in love, I should lay my past bare before the woman I cared about, to prevent her, if possible, from loving me ; at any rate to show her the real Sylvester Gray that lies hidden under an exterior which, fortunately, is not disagreeable to people."

I thought over the matter for some time in silence, and when next I spoke it was to deliver to him what, in after times, he always would laughingly refer to as my celebrated oration

*“ On the Advantages of Confessional  
Familiarity.”*

“ I believe that the name of the philosopher who first formulated the axiom that ‘ Familiarity breeds contempt ’ is lost in the roll-call of the crowd that populates the Wálhalla of forgotten dogmatists and proverb-makers.

“ When we were boys at Harrow together, you remember that there was a dear old gentleman, one of the masters of the fourth form—he is dead long ago, God rest his soul!—who used quaintly to observe, when there occurred in the day’s portion of Homer or Virgil a passage of which the meaning was obscure to a depth beyond the reach of even his profound scholarship, ‘ Never mind, laddie ; if I ever meet the author in the future life, I’ll ask him what he meant ; never mind about it now.’ I have always felt much the same with regard to this unknown proverbial philosopher. What did he mean ? Did he mean that to be familiar with a subject or object, whether on the physical or on

the mental plane, leads one to despise it? Undoubtedly he did—we may start by admitting thus much. But I would have him tell me the nature of this despite upon which he spoke so oracularly.

“ Was it the despite that the gladiator in the coliseum felt for the pampered, plethoric potentate who sat above him on his chryselephantine throne, surrounded by his sycophants and concubines, to laugh when the blood flowed from the wounds torn in his quivering flesh by the savage beasts trained to rend him for the amusement of a Roman emperor? Or was it the despite he felt for the brute that had wounded him, when it lay writhing in its death agony at his feet, ploughing up the gold dust and cinnabar of the arena, whilst the sweating, brutal mob upon the benches rent the air with their shrieks of ‘*Habet! Habet?*’ Was it the contempt that the circus gymnast feels for the danger that he courts for a livelihood, or that which he feels for *himself* as he prostitutes his manhood in making an exhibi-

tion of its power? On what plane must we seek the sentiment that the dogmatist wished to express? Who can tell? Shall we not rest content in accepting the proverb as it stands, and let each take from it for himself the meaning that suggests itself to him, and then, when we have interpreted it for ourselves metaphysically, or rather (if I may be allowed the polysyllable) met-egotistico-physically, and we ask ourselves what it all comes to, we have only to repeat, *but* to repeat with an inflection of voice which conveys its significance only to ourselves, 'Familiarity breeds contempt!'

"By this time you will be wondering what I am leading up to. My own interpretation of the axiom, of course; but what is that? Do not say my '*interpretation*,' say, rather, my '*application*' thereof; and that is as follows—if you will allow me an illustration, instead of the more difficult 'definition.'

"I am a person who never confides in anybody. I presume that this is the reason why people continually confide in me. With-

out this tendency, however, on the part of my fellow-men, there is no doubt that I should never have arrived at *my* application of our axiom, and I arrived at it as follows:

“Can anything be more terrible than remorse, if the remorse is genuine? Sometimes we know it to be purely theatrical, and then it excites contempt rather than sympathy; but when it is *real*, those who have seen it are not likely soon to forget the impression that it made upon them. I have seen it—once. And its victim was a woman.

“She was the whole world to a friend of mine; he had no thought that was not hers alone; the air was purer for him because she breathed it, the sun was brighter for him because it shone upon her—in a word he loved her with that absolute all-absorbing worship that comes to some men once, and to most men never. I had seen a good deal of the girl from her childhood, and she did me the honor of creating me her chief confidant. When, therefore, I realized that she was, for some inexplicable reason, making

herself and the man to whom I have alluded as my friend, miserable beyond all reasonable limits, by her steadfast refusal to listen to his supplications on his own behalf, I took it upon myself to ask her why she pursued this course with such unbending relentlessness. She answered me that she loved the man from the bottom of her soul, but that her whole life was stained by a past history so black that she would account herself a vile gift to be laid at the feet of the man that she held to be the king among human beings.

“Now, if a counterbalancing axiom were required to go with the proverb we have been discussing, we might take for it, ‘Confession eases the soul.’ That the two accompany, and are inseparable from one another, I propose at this present to show; and it was following the line of argument that I am now laying down that I asked my girl-friend to follow her established precedent and ‘tell me all about it.’

“‘No,’ said she, ‘the crime, the horror which overshadows my life is too ghastly,

too terrible for me to be able to whisper a word of it to a living soul.'

"Now, this was absurd; or at any rate there was a strong presumption that it was absurd. I would not for one moment admit the possibility of the literal, actual truth of her statement in her own case—she, a girl of nineteen, the carefully nurtured and only daughter of one of the noblest families in England! Therefore, there were two explanations for this statement of hers, which was made in all good faith, with pale face, wide-stricken eyes, and white lips, which gave testimony to the genuineness of her words, from her own mental standpoint at any rate.

"In the first place, let us admit—let us suppose, for the sake of argument,—that there had been in her life some boy-and-girl 'affair'; let us suppose it had terminated in a manner which to a highly-strung, sensitive girl had seemed highly tragic, whereas it had probably ended after a fashion merely moderately dramatic. Supposing, I say, for the

sake of argument, this to have been the case, we have to allow for natural exaggeration. The Turks have a proverb to the effect that 'A little hill in a low place fancies itself a mountain'; it is a saying which, like much of the Turkish proverbial philosophy, is founded on a keen appreciation of human nature, and it probably explains my young friend's magnified opinion on the subject of her Past (with a capital 'P'). It reminds one of the gigantic helmet that creates such an excitement in Dryden's 'Battle of the Books,' in the remotest corner of which, on calm examination, there turns out to be concealed an atrophied head no bigger than a walnut! It need hardly be said that I did not suggest these ideas to her by way of an invitation of confidence.

"Again, we have to consider the element of *hysteria*; and here we tread on the most delicate ground in dealing with an impressionable girl of nineteen! Excepting to the severely pathological mind, there is something intensely insulting about the idea of events



which have profoundly impressed us, never having happened at all ! Once, when I was very much younger, I was nearly garrotted on Chelsea Embankment, opposite Cheyne Walk, on my return from an evening at Carlyle's. I escaped with difficulty, and only by means of the prompt use of a weapon which I habitually carry. A few weeks later, at a dinner-party in the same neighborhood, a medical man was expatiating on the absurdity of stigmatizing the Thames Embankment after nightfall as 'dangerous,' and by way of counter-argument I cited my own experience with the Chelsea desperado. 'The doctor looked across the table and remarked, 'I hope you will not misunderstand me if I say that I don't believe that the incident you relate ever happened. Your studies in psychology, my dear Mr. Tompkins, show you to be endowed with a vivid, analytical imagination. Now, I think—as a medical man—that this experience of yours exists only in that imagination, and its reality to yourself results from an hysterical tendency to which I should

think you were, like most analytical psychologists, singularly subject. It is on the same principle that half-a-dozen innocent persons surrender themselves to justice as the perpetrators of every murder whose real author remains undiscovered.'

"I am free to confess that I felt extremely annoyed; and the remembrance of that annoyance was sufficiently strong to prevent my suggesting the same explanation of her Past (with a capital 'P') to the young person whose case I am discussing.

"I therefore urged her to confide to me the story which blackened her soul in her own estimation with such a cimmerian sable—on the unexpressed principle that, firstly: Confession eases the soul; and secondly: Familiarity (brought about by such confession) breeds contempt—contempt for the circumstances which it is advisable to forget; for we can never forget anything for which we do not feel that unexpressed contempt which prevents our taking the trouble to impress it on our memories. And *this* is the

despite which the gladiator feels for the dying animal at his feet, a despite born of an appreciation of our own physical or mental superiority over the circumstances which, before we encountered and conquered them, inspired us with an uneasy apprehension, if not with a positive alarm.

“ We have now arrived back once more at the point whence we originally started, and are in a position to ‘start fresh,’ as it were, with the continuation of the same story.

“ The young person, whose name I have omitted to mention, having therefore refused absolutely to share her trouble with me by way of confession, I changed the subject of conversation, and presently left her. I took counsel on her case from the ever-ready-to-advise pages of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and from the herb nicotian, and as a result wrote her that evening the following letter :

“ I asked you to-day to tell me of your trouble ; I asked you to confide to my ear the story which, blackening your whole life which is past, stands,

as you say, an insurmountable barrier in the way of your happiness in the future. You refused, and no doubt your reasons for doing so were just; but my reasons for inviting your confidence were none the less cogent, and it is because I wish to suggest to you a substitute for that confidence that I write to you now. I said to you, in inviting the recital, that 'Confession eases the soul.' I should rather have said, 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' In your case the two proverbs have the same significance and application. I suggest—and I trust that you will act upon my suggestion—that you should *write out* your story—your confession—call it what you will, for your own eyes alone: that you should, in this written narrative, pay the closest attention to the minute details of your case, and that you should give as much literary completeness thereto as possible; that you should endeavor to make your story a model of literary 'form;' in a phrase, that it should be complete as a 'word-picture,' as a faithful verbal representation of your Past. Nothing extenuate, nothing hide; if any points of your relation redound to your discredit, if any of its circumstances put you to shame, elaborate them

to the fullest point. My object in advising this course is as follows: 'Familiarity breeds contempt;' conversely 'Mystery inspires respect;' the unknown is always alarming; but the most awful thoughts, stated in bald English, lose half their terror. So long as you brood upon the events of your Past they will hold you with a morbid, unspeakable interest. You will be a problem to yourself, and you will be continually picturing to yourself the supreme moment when, to some chosen individual, you will lay bare, willingly or unwillingly (either mode is equally dramatic), this cherished secret of your soul.

"But follow my advice. Degrade your Past from its altitude as a great dramatico-psychological study to the level of an ordinary word-picture, a vulgar romance, a novelette in fact. You will then find yourself in a position to criticise it from the ordinary artistic point of view; you will find yourself noting inartistic touches in the relation; you will find places where your *esprit de l'escalier* will suggest that you might have adopted a course far superior to the one you actually *did* adopt; in fact you will find that your drama was in many respects con-

temptible. In a word, in familiarizing yourself with this story of yours, which, as it stands at present, is panoplied in the dim magnificence of the unexpressed, you will awaken in your mind a certain contempt for the picture you are criticising; and when once we become critical, illusion is necessarily at an end. Such is man: so long as he admires from a distance he is awed; the moment he touches he is in a position to insult. The beneficial effect of this course in your own case hardly needs, I think, to be pointed out. Your own history, viewed and criticised merely as a work of art, will lose its importance, its horrors, for you; and when this end has been attained, the remaining gradient—the one which leads to peace of mind—will be easily climbed, and you will reach the broad table-land of contentment, where your life may once more run smoothly and in quiet places.”

“I ceased there. I do not know whether she took my advice or no. From the fact that she never referred to my letter I concluded that she did; at least she subsequently married the friend in whose behalf I had pleaded.

“Than the illustration which I have introduced by the above story, I hardly think that I can give a more complete exposition of my meaning in coupling together the two proverbs which stand as the text of my sermon. What I have endeavoured to emphasize is the psychological *fact* that, *to express* a thought familiarizes it, and that to familiarize ourselves with a subject which has had any terrors for us, inspires us with a contempt for those terrors. Therefore, though I should be very loath to have it quoted as my advice that people should confide in one another the darker chapters of their life’s histories, still, if such gloomy periods of life stand out with undue prominence in the scheme of one’s existence, and throw into shadow the brighter passages, why, then I say that to state the case pictorially robs it of half its solemnity, that familiarity with the subject breeds in us a contempt for it, and that, in this manner, confession—even though it be made only to yourself—eases the soul.”

I ceased, rather astonished at my own

volubility and earnestness. Sylvester was lying in the position he had taken up on my sofa when I began, and I was relieved to observe by the regularity with which the smoke from his cigar rose into the air that he had not gone to sleep. When he found that I had really stopped haranguing him, he looked up at me and said seriously :

“Do you know, old man, you’ve quite astonished me; I didn’t think you were such a philosopher. I’ll say this for your sermon, that I quite understand and appreciate your point; but I can’t take your advice. My horror of myself for what is past is due to neither exaggeration nor imagination. Thank God, I have sufficient control over my mind to prevent myself brooding over my story; but I verily believe that, if I were to concentrate my mind upon it as you suggest, and go over it all again minutely, I should go mad! No, no, Jack; let it lie, let it lie. I don’t suppose for a moment that the occasion will ever arise for me to say anything to anybody about it.



Let it die with me when I die, old man. Believe me that, in this case, no amount of familiarity could ever breed contempt, and no amount of confession could ever ease the soul. Now let's change the subject."

We did so, and I never broached the matter to him again.

### III.

WHEN first, on looking from my window in Rome, this year, I saw the trees on the Monte Pincio bursting into leaf, and the landscape beyond taking a shade of green where before all had been gray and black, I shut up my books, and, rolling up my proof-slips, went out into the warm spring afternoon for my first drive of the year in the Borghese. I found that this happy thought of mine was hardly unique; the *allées*, tho' not by any means crowded, were very fairly lined with carriages; and I had not been in the gardens long, before the startling crimson of the Royal liveries, seen in the distance, warned me to be ready to uncover to the beautiful

Queen Margherita, and a few moments later the same ceremony had to be gone through for His Majesty Umberto I°. as he drove his four-in-hand round the villa paths, with the little Prince of Naples, Vittorio Emmanuele, at his side on the box seat. And I lazily wondered, as hundreds have done before me, how the king ever acquired the amazing art of holding the reins of his team in one hand, and his hat, which oscillated in incessant salutation, in the other.

Though I had only been in Rome a little over three months, my acquaintance in the Eternal City had become promiscuous and extensive; and finding that almost every one I knew was in the Burghese, I directed the coachman to seek the less-frequented *allées*, and the comparatively deserted outskirts of the park. I had been driving in solitary state for a few moments, when suddenly a victoria met mine in which reclined a singularly beautiful, golden-haired woman, who was laughing and chattering gaily with her attendant cavalier. I looked to see who this

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favoured individual might be; it was, of course, Sylvester Gray, handsome, *insouciant*, calm as ever. He had been in Rome three days, having arrived, bored with himself and everything else, from the Riviera. He saw me, and without the least hesitation or shame hailed me to stop. I did so, and he jumped out and brought me to be presented to his companion, who proved to be an American lady, the wife of a prominent member of the American colony in Rome. We chatted and congratulated ourselves for a few moments, and then drove on our respective ways, having noted our respective addresses with a view to a proximate re-ëncounter.

After that, for about a fortnight, I saw a good deal of Sylvester, who was still, at the age of thirty, the same incorrigible butterfly that he had always been. Never a reception in the city but he was there, never was a party complete without him; and certainly a more delightful companion it was impossible to conceive; he knew everything and every-

body. From the Coliseum by way of the Capitoline to the Vatican, and from San Paolo fuori dei Porti to the Catacombs of St. Calixtus, he seemed to know the history of every stone in Rome; and so Sylvester never suffered for want of companionship. His life, aimless as it was, was not without its charms, an ideal existence of *laissez aller*, as Anthony Trollope used to say of his brother Thomas, "a life of active indolence."

An afternoon that shall ever be marked with a crimson stone in the calendar of my life was that on which our ambassador, Sir John Savile Lumley, gave one of the most charming receptions of the year 18—. I had picked up Sylvester Gray at the Hotel Quirinale, where he had a charming suite of rooms "in perpetuity," and had strolled up with him to the Embassy, where the *fine fleur* of Roman society, aboriginal, colonial, and *passagère*, was assembled under the trees on Sir John's finely-kept lawns. It was a lovely afternoon, and Dame Nature was engaged in an active competition with her

handmaid, Art, to make the scene as bright and beautiful as it was possible for it to be ; and that is saying a good deal in the full glory of a Roman spring.

Sylvester and I had been strolling from group to group, and, as of yore, I had felt absolutely proud of him as I noted the smiles with which he was greeted by every knot of people whom he approached. We had made the complete round of the garden, when suddenly we came face-to-face with a woman. And Sylvester did a thing I never knew him to do before ; he stopped dead and looked at her.

She was just stepping out into the garden, the fingers of her left hand lightly resting on the arm of one of the Secretaries of Legation. There is only one word that in any adequate manner describes her,—she was superb.

She was of medium height, but the magnificent dignity of her carriage was such that she gave one the impression of a tall woman. Her dress, an arrangement in black *moiré* and beads, hung in straight lines about her

supple figure, and showed all its perfections with a fidelity that only such perfection could bear with impunity. Her small, arched foot, in its low slipper and black silk stocking, arrested the eye as it advanced from beneath her swaying skirts to step down into the garden, for it seemed ablaze with light as the sun struck the beaded embroidery of the slipper; a broad sash of soft, watered silk seemed, as it were, wrapped round her exquisite waist, and appeared reluctant to allow the curves of her figure to escape from its folds. One of her gloves, whose buff *peau de suède* formed the one point of colour about her, was tucked under this sash with her handkerchief, and revealed by its absence the beauty of the wax-white hand that at the moment was raised to her throat. Her face was almost indescribable, but my first impression was of a hard, almost repellent beauty, and of a complexion absolutely colorless, of the most perfect *blanc-mat* hue. The jaw was rather square, and the mouth (accentuated perhaps—but of this a

*man* cannot be sure—by a touch of crimson lip-salve) was straight, calm, and cold. The nose perfectly Greek, the eyes full, but rather deeply set, of a profound brown that most people called black. These were overshadowed by a pair of straight, fine eyebrows, forming, as it were, the southern boundary of a high, pale forehead, which was surrounded by the tiny curls of her raven black hair, curls that framed her pretty, white ears, as they escaped from beneath the broad brim of a hat turned up on one side *à la* Gainsborough. She paused on the steps to finish a remark that she was making to the Secretary, and as she stepped into the garden she looked up and caught Sylvester's eyes fixed upon her.

A great wave of crimson surged up from the beautiful throat to the marble brow, and as instantly died away, leaving the dead white of her complexion as it had been before.

The Secretary looked up, and, seeing Sylvester, exclaimed :

“ Ah ! Gray ! ” and then, turning to his

companion, he said in Italian: "Princesse, I beg your permission to present to you a great friend of ours." And then, indicating Sylvester, who stood bareheaded in the sunshine, he made the presentation in form: "Mr. Sylvester Gray—Madame la Princesse Pamphila-Severi."

There is an hour in the life of man that strikes his fate, says some one in an old play; and Sylvester Gray's struck at five o'clock on this beautiful March afternoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's not only a hit, it's a bull's-eye," said the Secretary to me, half an hour later, as we passed Sylvester and the Princess Pamphila-Severi walking slowly round the lawn. They were conversing in Italian. He was talking volubly, with his little conquering air, and she, her eyes fixed on the ground before her, listened to him, the hardness of her expression softened by the half-smile that flickered round her mouth, and by the little spark which illuminated her eyes beneath their long lashes.



“Who is she?” I asked.

“Great Heaven! fancy a man asking who *she* is! Ah! but you’re a stranger, and, in a manner, a recluse. Well, here is her whole history for you. She was the only daughter of the beautiful Marchesa di Santo-Moriani, and on the death of her mother, six years ago, finding herself alone in the world and a beautiful heiress of nineteen, married the young Prince Pamphila-Severi. He was a charming fellow, but jealous as the Moor of Venice, and one day was idiotic enough to grossly insult Vicomte de Brissac, second secretary of the French Embassy, because he had laughingly remarked, before a room-full of people at Prince Torlonia’s, that he would sooner wear in his *boutonnière* a gardenia given him by the princess than the highest grade of the Legion of Honour; and as the princess accepted the challenge and held out to him a gardenia from her bouquet, he took the rosette of the Legion from his buttonhole and threw it in her lap. Five minutes afterward Pamphila-Severi stamped on his toe,

and when the Frenchman expostulated he struck him across the face with his glove. De Brissac killed him next morning in the Borghese, and was transferred to St. Petersburg; and the princess, six months only after her marriage, became the coldest and most beautiful widow in Rome. But she's badly hit at last, if I mistake not, and you and I are lucky in being here to see the fun, my dear doctor."

I made up my mind that I had better find my way home alone, and so I took leave of our amiable host and left the Embassy.

Sylvester, at the door, was putting the beautiful Italian into her victoria, and as he did so I heard him say, interrogatively :

*"A rivederla, principina?"*

*"A rivederla, signore ; si faccia vedere presto di nuovo."*

*"La ringrazio, principina, non mancherò. Andate 'stasera al palazzo?"*

A moment's hesitation and a quick blush ; then shortly :

*"Sì."*

And the victoria whirled off over the Roman pavement. I took Sylvester by the arm, and said :

“ Come and dine with me.”

“ Dine ?” he replied ; “ not exactly !” But he came all the same.

“ Are you going to the ball at the Quirinal to-night ?” said he, during the dinner.

“ No,” I replied.

“ I must,” said he ; “ she will be there.”

Until this moment he had not referred to the beautiful princess, and I knew him too well to broach the subject.

“ Is she pleasant ?” I asked, unconcernedly.

“ Pleasant ! She’s the most superlatively beautiful, the most maddeningly fascinating woman I ever met !”

I had heard Sylvester say this of fifty other women, but I never saw such serious symptoms developed in him before. His silence and evident preoccupation were ominous, and I caught myself wondering, after he had left me to dress for the ball at the palace,

whether the butterfly had been snared at last. Upon my soul, I hoped so; but as I lay back in my chair and pushed away my neglected proof-sheets, I found that my mind had wandered back to Harrow and to the little cottage that looked towards London, to Idlesse, to its terraces and rose garden, and a sharp pain flew across my chest and seemed to settle on my throat as, in my mind's eye, the Princess Stella Pamphila-Severi stood before me, and by her side, radiant in the holy purity of her girlish beauty, there came and stood the wraith of Evelyn Wooster.

#### IV.

OF the progress of this narrative to its terrible termination, I know by personal observation next to nothing. Until the last leaf of this chapter of life had been turned, I counted for nothing in the pages of the story; indeed, I never knew the Princess Pamphila-Severi save by sight and from hearsay, until I had played my part in the

last act of the drama whose *dénouement* was so rapidly approaching when Sylvester left my rooms in that cool March evening to dress for the State Ball at the Quirinal. But he frequently spoke to me of his love, of his happiness, and of his misery; and from these confessions, joined to those of the princess, whose intimate friend I had afterward the honour of becoming, and with whom I frequently held long, long conversations on the subject of our dear Sylvester, I have collected, and in a manner compiled, this section of my story—a section which is, in fact, my story itself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sylvester was not by any means a “dandy,” but he dressed always with an attention to detail which, to a keen observer, revealed the real man to a very great extent, and was infinitely pleasing. He had a theory on the subject which always struck me, careless though *I* always was in such matters, as excellent.

“A man or a woman can only appear at

his best intellectually, when he knows that his appearance is beyond criticism," he used to say. "I have seen a charming man and a brilliant conversationalist put absolutely *hors de combat* by the knowledge that he had been splashed with mud on his way to a reception. I have seen a woman entirely lose her sense of dignity and repose by a terrible fear that her hair was coming down; and I have seen a lecturer lose the whole thread of his discourse in consequence of his cravat becoming disarranged. It is therefore one's duty to oneself and to the world at large to be perfectly 'turned out' at all points."

Sylvester's court dress was a sartorial triumph. His coat and breeches were of the darkest blue velvet, and innocent of the slightest wrinkle; his buttons and the hilt of his sword were of the most exquisite workmanship; and as he entered the ball-room of the Palazzo on this eventful evening, dressed with the supremest care, and with the Order of the Annunziata hanging below his cravat, he was well worthy of the silent homage that

was paid him in the admiring scrutiny of the throng that circulated in all directions. Indeed, it would have been difficult to have found a more perfect specimen of the genus *homo* as he stood out from the crowd in answer to a summons from one of the Queen's gentlemen-in-waiting, to engage in a short conversation with her Majesty, to whom, as an old *habitué* of the Eternal City, he was well known.

The ball was at its height when, leaning on the arm of her uncle, the old Prince Marcelini, the Princess Stella Pamphila-Severi made her appearance. There was a slight movement at the principal entry as she stepped into the room, dressed, as usual, in swaying black, embroidered in jet, her sole ornaments a band of diamonds encircling her wrist, and a diamond crescent set amid the raven masses of her hair. As she made her obeisance to Queen Margherita, no eyes were more fascinated by the dignity and beauty of her presence than those of Sylvester Gray, as he stood against a pillar at the end of the room,

waiting for the signal that should call him to her side.

It came at length, when she had dismissed the last of the more eager candidates for recognition, and Sylvester advanced and took his place at her side with the little imperious and almost proprietary air that was natural to him and seemed offensive to no one. A moment later an aide-de-camp spoke a few words to Prince Marcellini, and, having smilingly dismissed her escort with a little inclination of the head, the Princess Stella found herself alone in the crowd with Sylvester Gray.

“And how have you spent the time since we met this afternoon, Signor Gray?” asked she, turning her eyes full upon him.

“I have been with my friend, the English Dr. Tompkins, Princesse. He had not the honour of an introduction to you at Sir John’s, and so I had an eager listener, for whose benefit I could put my thoughts continuously into words.”

“Ah?”—this with a little ironical inflection—“they were pleasant ones, I hope.”



“They were exclusively of you, Princesse.”

“Of course! And of what else?”

“Of myself, naturally.”

“Yes, naturally. At that point of the conversation, or rather of the monologue, you must have been really interesting and eloquent, Signor Gray.”

“You are pleased to be sarcastic, Princesse. I wish I could flatter myself that the most eloquent recital of the doings and sayings of Sylvester Gray could awaken an interest, however slight, in the mind of the Princess Pamphila-Severi.”

“Do you really? See, is it not close and crowded here? Let us be seated a few moments in this ante-room. Do I keep you from your friends?”

“I have no friends, Princesse, when I am with you. Indeed, I have no interest in life, nothing, save to be by your side, to hear you speak, and when I dare, to answer you.”

“Ah?” as before.

All this had been said on either side half-laughingly, half-seriously. Sylvester was con-

scious of a nervous curl at the corners of his mouth, and felt himself growing more and more grave, as the Princess Stella, in smiling, displayed her exquisite, snowy teeth, and her eyes blazed with the genuine amusement of a beautiful woman who knows her power and uses it boldly, half fearful the while of its effects, and of its possible "boomerang" qualities.

They had taken a couple of arm-chairs in the little ante-room. In one of them the Princess Stella had thrown herself in a graceful, easy pose, and shading her eyes from the light with her black feather fan, was looking out from underneath it with an amused expression at Sylvester, who, seated opposite her, with his elbows on his knees, and playing nervously—for him—with the lace of his cocked hat, was looking back at her, his eyebrows slightly contracted, as if he hardly knew what to make of the beautiful woman before him. Hitherto he had found them all the same, varying only in rapidity and degree of conquest; this was a new va-

riety. There was something infinitely alluring in the parted, crimson lips and exquisite teeth, that was strangely modified by the baffling, almost repellent, look which shone out of the deep-brown eyes, even when they sparkled with the intensest amusement.

"Here is a woman," thought he, "who would lure a man to the verge of destruction and leave him there, and be as cold as ice through it all. And yet, only to look at her makes my heart beat as if I were a boy of sixteen."

"Well," said the Princess, breaking the silence at length, "you were going to tell me about yourself."

"Was I?"

"You as good as said you were; and I want you to. There's a confession to lead off with. Now, be equally frank with me. Come! *Avanti!*"

"Really, Princesse, you are flattering indeed. What do you want to know about me?"

"Everything—from the beginning." Still the same little mocking smile.

“Well, I was born of poor but honest parents, not a hundred miles from——”

“What! I was being serious, for once in a while, Signore.”

“And I also.”

“Very well, then; it is quite obvious that we are both out of our element at a ball. Will you take me back? I must find my good uncle, who will be wanting to leave.”

“Ah! do not go, I beg of you. Come, be seated, Princesse, and I will tell you everything that I have ever done that is likely to interest you.”

“*Cielo!* Signor Gray. Why, I am sure I should be here until next year if I were to yield to the maddening temptation which I feel to accept your offer. Come, it is late, and I must *fly*. Ah! how can you utter such a *banalité*? The word ‘angel’ would have risen to the lips of every other man in the room; I did not expect it of you. Do you know,” she added, as Sylvester rose reluctantly to escort her back to the ball-room, “you are very different from most English-

men I have met. In fact, you are really interesting to me, and *I* am hard to interest. I checked your confidences just now; you shall make them to me to-morrow, at four, if you will. Ah! Prince, I was looking for you."

And transferring her hand from Sylvester's arm to that of her uncle, who gravely saluted her late cavalier, the Princess Stella was gone.

A few minutes later, wrapping his cloak around him, Gray left the Quirinal, and, turning to the right instead of to the left, reached the Porta Pia, which he passed in spite of the remonstrance of the sentinel, who warned him that the Campagna was unsafe after night-fall, and struck out across country to be alone with his thoughts.

What they were, it would have been difficult even for himself to say. Of one thing he was certain; he had never been so fascinated, so violently attracted by any woman before. He could not understand her, and, priding himself on an intimate knowledge of the ways

of woman, gathered from a wide experience of the sex, he was filled with an unreasoning anger against himself, against her, and against the world at large, at finding himself baffled absolutely and completely by this enigmatical specimen. Honestly, he was at fault. He could not account for her, and for her manner of treating him. He felt, he *knew* that she was attracted by him, and yet she repelled him, at once, by her wilfully transparent misunderstanding of his words, and by the calm dignity with which she seemed to treat him as a spoiled child. Her very frankness was galling to him, and yet she must care for him beyond a mere acquaintanceship or she would not have defied Italian social etiquette by singling him out for a *tête-à-tête*, in the midst of the gossiping crowd at the Palazzo Quirinale. If she *didn't*, she was a heartless coquette. At this moment something inside himself said very rudely and distinctly, "You're another."

This was a new aspect of the case. Did he *want* her to care for him more than

merely as an acquaintance? Yes, a thousand times, yes! Well, and what then? Was he prepared calmly and deliberately to flirt with her, to make love to her as he had done, and with complete success, to a hundred women before her? No, the idea was revolting. Could he imagine her as his wife? The cold glitter of those wonderful eyes rose before him in the darkness, and he felt something of the terror that one feels for some beautiful wild beast that one longs to caress and to fondle, but which one pets very watchfully, and then carefully locks back in its cage before turning one's attention to something else. As the fever of his imagination increased, he pictured her to himself throwing herself into his arms and looking up into his eyes, and as in his waking dream he bent to kiss them, those wonderful lips, with their delicate, artificial touch of crimson, parted in a little mocking smile, and revealed the clinched white teeth within them, whilst he could almost hear the low soft laugh that rippled from them, as he thrust the beautiful

head away from him, repelled by something essentially indefinable, essentially fiendish.

No, certainly, no. He was not in love with her in the ordinary sense of the term. It would have seemed horrid to him if she had been in love with him; there was nothing gross, nothing material in his feeling for her, but he *knew* that to sit near her, to talk to her, to watch the varying expression of her matchless, proud face, to inhale the exquisite fragrance that she spread around her as she moved—all this was a sensuous ecstasy in which there was nothing earthly, nothing sordid. Then he flew into a violent temper with himself for having paid her empty compliments, instead of talking seriously during that little *tête-à-tête*. It was his own cursed folly that had cut their conversation short. Why did he treat her as an ordinary woman, when he had felt that she was unique from the instant he had first laid his eyes upon her? —Great Heavens! It was only this afternoon!

He would see her to-morrow—to-morrow



—in the afternoon. Well, he had plenty to do between this and then ; the time would fly. (Oh ! Sylvester, Sylvester ! ) How would she receive him ? He felt that if she should be as tempting and repellent, kind and sarcastic as she had been to-day, he would be irritated, angry. Diable ! he was not a child, was he ? Very well then. If she, so to speak, hauled down her colours and came like a lamb to the slaughter, he knew that she would fall forever in his estimation ; he would hate her. What did he want ? Never mind, he would go there and—

“ Carita, signore, per amore di Dio.”

A vile-looking *lazzarone* of the Campagna, in filthy *contadino* costume, stood before him with outstretched hand, asking for alms. He passed on, angry at the interruption.

“ Carita, signore, carita ! ”

The beggar was keeping up alongside, and the demand had something of a threat in it. Sylvester Gray looked down at the revolting creature trotting by his side, noted the tremendous muscles of the chest and of

the extended arm, the covetous leer in the wicked eyes, and the grin which illuminated his face in the moonlight, as the blackguard eyed the sparkling buttons on Sylvester's court dress and the jewel of the Annunziata hanging at his neck. Gray suddenly awoke to the fact that he was probably a couple of miles beyond the walls of Rome, and that he had carelessly let his cloak swing open, allowing the cut steel facets and the gems of his ornaments to sparkle in the moonlight. He put his hand into his pocket. As is usual under such circumstances and in such costume, he had not a centime with him.

"I have no money," said he shortly, in Italian.

"Oh yes, you have, signore."

"I have not."

"Then give me that," and the *lazzarone* pointed to the order of the Annunziata.

"Take care," cried Sylvester, springing back a couple of yards.

"Take care yourself," said the bandit, and

drawing a long stiletto from his sheepskin he sprang forward.

Quick as thought, Sylvester whipped his rapier from its sheath, presenting the point at the bosom of the man, who had not imagined that his opponent was armed, and could not check the impetus with which he had sprung forward.

The sword passed through his body and stuck out at his back. As he fell with a sob to the ground, the narrow blade snapped, and Sylvester stood with the remaining fragment in his hand, looking at the wretch lying at his feet. The blade had passed through his heart—in a moment it was over—he was quite dead.

He lay there in the moonlight, his gray-white face turned up to the sky, and Sylvester, as he looked at him, found himself vaguely wondering what this man's history might be. Had he any relations waiting in some cabin of the *Campagna* for his return laden with the spoils of the night's work, or was he some solitary drunken vagabond,

living alone on the proceeds of his vagabondage?—who could tell? Not Sylvester. At that moment something sparkled in the dust close to the dead man's head. Gray stooped to pick it up; it was simply a common pebble with a drop of dew upon it that had reflected a moonbeam like a gem. He tossed it from him, slightly irritated at having troubled himself to pick it up; then he thrust the broken sword into his scabbard. How queerly the empty lower part of the scabbard wobbled as he shook it, almost like the flexible top of a fishing rod; it felt *dead*. Then he turned and walked back to the Porta Pia and so, down past the Piazza Aldobrandini, to the Via Nazionale and his hotel. Wearied out, he retired at once to bed, and fell asleep almost immediately.

He dreamt that once more he walked down the solitary road leading out onto the Campagna. The Princess Stella walked a few paces in front of him, and despite his most agonized efforts he could not overtake her. At last they came to a kind of *Chapelle*

*Ardente*, in which were ranged three biers, two only of which were occupied by corpses. On the first lay Evelyn Wooster, on the second the *lazzarone* whom he had killed a few hours since, and whom, in the obsession of his mind, he seemed already to have forgotten; the Princess stood at the head of the third, and he at its feet.

“Well, Signor Gray,” said she, with her mocking smile, showing her exquisite teeth, “is this for you or for me?”

A wild fury seemed to seize him as he strove to catch her to thrust her down upon the empty bier; but she escaped him, dodging in between and around the two corpses, over which she ran her fingers, as if over the keys of a piano, as she skipped round them. At last, just as he thought to hold her, he caught his foot upon the end trestle of the vacant bier and fell extended upon it. Once there, he was powerless to move a finger, and he lay watching the princess as she advanced towards him; then she stooped still lower—and kissed him—

\* \* \* \* \*

Sylvester woke, trembling in every limb. It was late, and he rose and dressed himself carefully to go about the occupations of the day.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four o'clock came, and almost on the stroke of the hour he passed beneath the *porte cochère* of the Palazzo Severi. On the rim of the basin into which the water fell from the faucets of a *Renaissance* fountain, sat two cats, the one snow-white, the other spotlessly black. Both wore golden collars round their necks, and both watched the water with unblinking, emerald eyes. As Sylvester approached, one of them—the white one—rose lazily and stretched himself, closing his eyes luxuriously, so as to enjoy the operation to the utmost, the extended claws of his fore-feet giving him a firm hold of the roughened stone. Sylvester Gray passed on; he didn't like cats.

The grave *mâitre d'hôtel* showed him into a gorgeous salon at the top of a flight of

massive steps, and a feeling of sacramental gloom came over him at the idea of meeting the princess amid such surroundings. Next moment a smiling Parisian maid entered the salon by a *portière* at the farther end, and summoned him to the presence of her mistress.

The Princess Stella's boudoir was hung with embroidered curtains of a pinkish yellow—of a faded Gloire de Dijon rose-color; a few cabinets of Venetian Renaissance carving were strewn with gold and silver knick-nacks of all kinds. A brazen candelabrum of Venetian workmanship hung from the ceiling, and the floor was strewn with skins of animals. In one corner, on an easel, stood a small Meissonnier; in another stood a second easel bearing an exquisite Greuze. A book-case of carved ebony occupied the space between the windows, which were filled with the most delicately tinted Murano glass; and on an occasional-table stood a Chinese idol grinning with smug self-satisfaction at his own superlative ugliness. A door, concealed by a *portière*,

led into an inner room, and on a low divan covered entirely by a bear-skin of the deepest black, lay the Princess Stella.

She was wrapped, rather than clothed, in the loose folds of a light murrey-colored cashmere; her feet, clad in striped silk, were thrust carelessly into oriental slippers; and she raised herself upon one arm as she extended the other to shake Sylvester by the hand.

“So you have come—really come, Signor Gray, in spite of all your other engagements?”

“I would, Princesse, that it were possible for me to stay away; but when you have said ‘come,’ I have no longer any engagements.”

“Ah! Ah! Ah! *Voilà que ça recommence!* Do not, I beg of you. Let us be sensible; sit down. Seriously, I am glad to see you:—I have looked forward all day to your coming, and now you are here, you must not waste time in *banalités* and compliments. And what have you been doing since we parted last night?”

“Oh! the usual things. I spent the morn-



ing in calling and writing, the afternoon in writing and calling. Nothing of any interest disturbs the even current of my life."

"And he is afraid to tell me that he has killed a man with those handsome white hands of his!" This lightly and without looking at him.

"Princesse!"

"You are astonished? That is not right. Emotions do not come well to Signor Sylvester Gray; they cause wrinkles and gray hairs, and are bad. Besides, you must never be astonished at anything I say to you. Ah!" as he was about to interrupt her, "I know many things, and you must not seek to know how."

"But, Princesse, I know I was alone on the Campagna. There were no witnesses to his death but the stars above us."

"Ah! then you *did* kill him?"

"In Heaven's name, what does this mean?"

"It means, Signor Gray, that I saw you, as you left the palace, turn up towards the Porta Pia. I knew the dangers of the Cam-

pagna, and I was frightened—yes, frightened for you; and when I arrived here I sent a servant to follow you, but he only heard from a *contadino*, who was entering the gates, that a *lazzarone* had been killed some distance from the city. Oh! my friend, but I was frightened, and have been wretched for fear that you also were hurt.”

“And you have taken the pains to inquire about me?”

“Yes. Are you surprised?”

“Surprised! I am overwhelmed. What can I be to you, that you should care what becomes of me?”

“Only this, Signore, that you are the only man that has ever attracted—has ever interested me. Do you think it very wrong that I should indulge myself thus, for the first time in my life?”

“And I—what shall I say to you—what shall I say to you?” He sank upon his knees by her side, and covered her exquisite hands with kisses. “How I love you!” he murmured; “how I love you!”

For a moment she did not stir. He looked up at the grand, dark eyes that were fixed upon his in a gaze of infinite tenderness; and even as he looked, his thoughts wandered, in rebellion against his will, to the other women at whose side he had knelt in just such a manner, and to whom he had spoken just such words oftentimes before. His thought seemed to communicate itself to her. She grew a shade paler, as she bade him rise with a little imperious gesture.

“Do not talk to me like that, I beg of you,” she said. “Keep such idle words for the other women. I do not ask them of you. It is enough for me that I care for you, and that it is a delight for me that you should come and sit here and talk to me. Never tell me that you love me, Signor Gray. I shall not believe it.”

“But I tell you it is true, true, true. You must, you *shall* believe it.”

She looked at him for a moment almost mournfully, and then, her lips wreathing themselves into the well-known mocking

smile that he had learned already to dread, she slowly shook her head and murmured, "No, no, no. It is not true."

Sylvester started to his feet, and began pacing to and fro across the skins strewn upon the floor. He stood still, at last, a few paces from her, and said, in a dry, choking voice,

"God help me! I do not know what to say to you."

"No," she replied, "you have said it all so often that it has become mechanical, a mere theatrical *pose*, a *mise-en-scène*. You cannot think of anything new to say to me, of anything that you have not continually said to your other victims. Ah! my friend, do not imagine that I am going to swell the number, am going to write my name at the foot of the list. No, no!"

"Princesse, *angela mia*, do not be so cruel to me. Look at me as I stand before you. Supposing I confess to you, what you know already, that I have laid my homage at the feet of other women; granted that all this has made me a crawling, abject wretch, not

fit to lay my worthless self in the dust before you; can you not believe me when I tell you that I have never known love till *now*, that I adore you?"

"No," said she slowly, "I cannot believe you. You must have said all this to others before me, and much more. Why should I flatter myself that at last you are telling the truth?"

"But if I am not, why should I be here?"

"For two reasons: first, you know that I love you—aye, love you, Signor Gray, but it is a confession of strength and not of weakness—and you are flattered and would willingly add the Princess Stella Pamphila-Severi to your conquests; and secondly, you think it pleases me to hear you say, 'I love you.' But it does not, it does not. I hate to hear you say it. I would give my soul to be able to believe you, but I cannot. You are playing with me as you have always played with women, and always will; and I—well, it is enough for me to know that I value your companionship, your friendship—

do not mistake me—above anything else in the world. Oh, how I wish you would be a brother to me! I should not care for what the world would say of us. Is this impossible, think you?"

He paused for a moment, and then, in a half-mocking tone, he replied :

"Not at all, Princesse. I will be a brother to you. I will come and talk to you of my plans, of my pleasures, of my triumphs in the camp of Mars and the court of Venus, and when I marry—*when I marry*, I say—you shall be the first to wish me joy. *Vi piace cosi ?*" He laughed a little, hard, dry laugh, and flung himself into a chair at a little distance, watching her as she became white and crimson by turns, and then he added, "You see, Princesse, it is hardly the same thing, is it? hardly the same?"

"No," she said, covering her face with her hands, "it is not the same thing."

"And yet you would fain believe me; tell me *why* you cannot do so."

"Answer me, rather, why can you not

*make* me believe you, if it is true, this that you say, that you love me?"

"I do not know. I cannot tell."

And even as he said the words, the reason stood out clearly in his mind. He could not impart a tone of sincerity to the words he had said so often, sincere, agonizingly sincere, though they were at this moment. At last he loved—loved truly, deeply, passionately; but between him and his love there rose the impassable barrier of his past life, that stood like a wall of ice between them.

And so he turned to go, sick at heart, overwhelmed by this calamity with which he knew not how to grapple, how to contend.

"You will come again soon?" she said.

"Whenever you will."

"Then to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," he said, reflectively, searching his mind for the engagements he had made.

She saw his hesitation, and exclaimed, petulantly:

"There, there, go! and come when you

have time to spare. I will not burden your mind with thoughts of me. Go, go !”

“To-morrow, then,” he exclaimed, recklessly, “to-morrow be it, and so *a rivederla*, Princesse. To-morrow at this time.”

He kissed the hand that she extended to him, and then gazed into her eyes, a mute, longing appeal for permission to kiss the lips closed in such rigid determination. She divined his thought and answered :

“No, no ; you must leave me.”

So he left her ; every pulse beating wildly, tumultuously, the blood coursing through his veins like a torrent of flame. The position was new, overwhelming, agonizing. He could hardly think ; at every moment he saw the beautiful face before him, and his dream of last night returned to his mind with a vividness that was appalling.

v.

ON leaving the Palazzo Severi, Sylvester turned into the Corso, hardly noticing the direction in which his steps were leading him,



crossed the Via Nazionale, and reaching the foot of the Capitoline, scaled the steps leading to the Piazza del Campidoglio, and leaning on the parapet, looked out over the Forum. Far away in the twilight he could see the wooded space stretching out beyond the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, and crossing the Forum and taking the Via Gregoriana almost unconsciously, he was soon beyond the gates and strolling along the Appian Way in the direction of the catacombs of St. Calixtus. At the catacombs he turned on his footsteps and returned to the city. He reached the Hotel Quirinale at about eight, wearied out with the strain upon his mind, and flung himself into an arm-chair to continue the thread of thought that he had been spinning ever since he had left the Princess Pamphila-Severi.

What was the note missing from the chord he had tried in vain to strike in chaunting his song of worship to the Princess Stella. He had never failed before in persuading women that he loved them; why should the moment

of his defeat be postponed until the very moment when the thought of failure was an agony too great to be borne? Something told him that it was for the very reason that he had hitherto been acting a part, that he could not throw his whole soul into his words when at last the curtain fell upon the comedy, and a scene of the drama of real life began to be enacted behind it.

“ If I tell her,” thought he, “ that I love but her, the thought of this woman or that woman who has believed it before this, will come between us like a barrier of brass. I have said all there is to be said so often, so thoughtlessly, so unmeaningly, that now, in her presence, it seems sacrilege even to *think* these worn-out platitudes of experimental love. I *must* find some means of proving my love to her, of laying open before her the truth that lies at the bottom of my soul. The truth! My God! what am I dreaming of? Do I propose to myself to go in cold blood to her and tell her that whole horrible story? No, a thousand times no! I would rather kill

myself. But how can I go to her and say: "I love you; I love you, and I cannot live without you!" with that horrible crime on the soul that I fling at her feet? If I could succeed in convincing her and in making her my own, how could I live with *that* between us? And suppose that, having given me her love, some day she should learn about it? She knows the life, the careless, cruel life that I have led; but she can never guess that it is that terrible fragment of a past, in other respects forgotten, that has prevented my marrying, has till now extinguished even my power to love. To tell her or not to tell her—what shall I do? Surely she will believe me when I have torn out my soul for her in recalling all the ghastly horror of ten years ago, so that she may know how vile a thing it is that grovels in the dust before her; and yet, when it is told—and what greater proof of my love can I offer her than the telling?—what if the horror of it should make her loathe me, and I should never see her again? Oh God! what a punishment is this!

what a punishment! How richly I have deserved it all; and yet, had you lived, oh my sweet, first Love, how you would have pardoned me, and spared me the agony of these ten years!"

And as he thought of Evelyn Wooster, the dream-face that he conjured up was obliterated by a reclining figure with laughing black-brown eyes, with crimson lips and teeth of driven snow, which held up a dainty, white hand for him to kiss, and said in a half-regretful tone:

"How I wish I could believe you, Signor Gray; how I wish I could believe you!"

\* \* \* \* \*

He rose at last, and having changed his dress, issued forth in the direction of the new quarter that has raised its pallid house-fronts against the blue Italian sky, round the precincts of St. John of the Lateran, to call upon the friend with whom I had seen him driving that first day in the Borghese, a prominent member of the American colony that

has always kept, and always will keep, things lively in the Eternal City.

As good luck would have it, he found her in and alone, and after the first greetings were over he opened his case with the question :

“ Have you read Dostoievski’s ‘ *Le Crime et le Chatiment* ? ’ ”

“ Yes—what of it ? ”

“ Oh, nothing ! only I was thinking of it to-day. It is a book which gives one a good deal of food for thought, does it not ? ”

“ Well, yes. But what particular passage has made so profound an impression upon the placid and unimpressionable Sylvester Gray ? ”

“ Several passages ; but particularly the one where Rodia tells Sonia that it was *he* who murdered the old woman. Do you think he ought to have told her ? That it was either his duty, or expedient to do so ? ”

“ Well, the circumstances were peculiar. Sonia being a woman of the town, for whom his feelings were not so much love as an in-

describable and almost morbid attraction, he could not expect that his confession would have such an effect upon her as it would on an innocent and pure-minded woman. And again, you see he did not confess to her as a proof of his love, but was rather actuated by the selfish motive of relieving his own mind of half of the burden, and, by confessing to her, of making her carry half of it. It was as necessary for his enfeebled mind to tell somebody his secret as it was for the barber of King Midas; and she, in her degraded condition, was the only creature he felt fit to associate with. It was the sympathy of infamy, not the confidence of love."

"Then you do not think that had they been truly *in love* with one another he would equally have confessed, and that had she been 'an ideal woman,' he *ought* to have done so?"

"Certainly not! No man has any right to shatter the confidence of a woman by the confession of his previous follies—well, crimes if you will. If the thing is long past and forgotten, it is his duty to die keeping his

secret ; his wife can never guess it alone, and to confess it to her before or after marriage is purely cowardly. It is not the result of a high-souled honesty, it is simply a selfish horror of paying the penalty of a sin in the past by keeping the secret to oneself and being the only sufferer in the present."

"And supposing there is always a possibility of the man's sin being discovered? Do you not think that the constant dread must dwarf his love, and paralyze his efforts to devote his whole soul to his wife?"

"Not necessarily ; but if that were really the case, as might happen in the instance of a super-sensitive man, let him tell her after they are married."

"And lay himself open to the reproach that he has married her under false pretences? My God ! how awful !"

"Not at all, my good man. A little 'scene' might follow, it is true ; but you men attach far less importance to 'scenes' than we do ; you go away to the club and smoke it off. We, on the contrary, have no

soothing resource but tears, which, in their soothing effects, are far behind expletives and nicotine. But the scene blows over, and though it should be avoided, if possible—that's why I say *don't* confess, for there is always a little tender spot left behind—a man's crimes, which a woman forgives most easily, are those he has committed against another woman. It sounds odd, doesn't it? but it's the case. At first a young wife fancies that her husband has never loved, anyone but her, but this belief soon gives way to another, which is, that he has never loved anyone else *as much* as her. And the latter thought is an excellent substitute for the former, and is more lasting!"

"But, my dear friend, we are straying far from the subject. Rodia's crime was not a prior attachment, it was the treacherous murder of a defenceless old woman. Now supposing a man has done something like that, or even worse—had done something *lache*, *infame*, disgraceful—has he any right to take the love of a pure woman without telling her



what she is doing in loving him ? Surely not."

" Ethically, ideally, *no*. But actually, practically, *yes*. She loves him and he loves her ; that is enough. The crime may never be discovered, may never cloud the horizon of their married happiness ; but if it does come out one day, though the woman may be shocked, stunned for a moment, *if he has been a good husband to her*, and more especially if she be a mother, all he has to say to her is, ' Yes, I did this thing, but I loved you so dearly that I could not bring myself to tell you of it, for fear that it would cloud your happiness as it has clouded mine. I prayed that you might never know, and would have guarded the secret from you with my life ; but now it's too late, and I have only one excuse ; I loved you then, I love you now more dearly still ; the purity you have brought into my life has driven the sharper agony of remorse from my soul ; can you not look into my eyes and love me only as *you* have known me ? ' "

“And you don’t think that the knowledge that they *know* will rankle in the minds of both, but in hers especially?”

“Not seriously, so long as he behaves himself well; but to a certain extent it must, of course, and for that reason—now I am going to shock you—I consider it a brave and honourable man’s duty to sink his own feelings and *lie* boldly if there is no chance of his being found out. He ought, if there are no actual witnesses who can give him the lie, to deny the fact and defy the world to produce its proofs. A loving woman will believe her husband against the world, and if by any chance his lie is discovered he has always the resource I mentioned first, he can plead his love, and I, as a woman of some experience, say that he would have nothing to fear.”

Sylvester rose to go.

“I am immensely obliged to you,” said he; “I have learnt a most interesting lesson this evening which I shall not easily forget. However, there is one final question which I should like to ask you. Supposing the

whilome criminal loves a woman of exceptional intelligence and strength of mind—do you not think that if he were to bare his soul to her, and confess his crime to her before marrying her, actuated thereto by a genuine feeling of honor, she would take his confession to be the most convincing proof of his love, and love him with all the greater strength ? ”

“She *might*; but I should consider it an exceedingly dangerous experiment.”

## VI.

ON the following day at four, and on many days after, Sylvester found himself either seated opposite the Princess Stella in the little quaint boudoir, or pacing feverishly up and down the room across the tiger skins, stopping now and then to turn and answer some laughing remark of hers with a little impatient, dramatic gesture.

Their bond of sympathy never ripened into anything closer. When he would implore her to believe in his love for her, she

would shake her head half-mournfully, and compliment him on his histrionic talents; and he, alas! could not entirely clear his mind of the suspicion that she spoke what was in a great measure the truth. In the midst of his most impassioned utterances, when he would fall on his knees by her side and beg her to look through his eyes into his soul which was all hers, there would flash across him a pang of memory for his past life, and he would ask himself *why* should this woman believe in him more than the others, and he would suddenly remember having used the same words to others before her. Then these thoughts would seem to communicate themselves to her, and she would push him away with a little contraction of her brows and an expression almost of repulsion, and the next moment their conversation would have resumed its accustomed tone, and they would speak of books, of pictures, and of his travels, but never of himself. Often she used to say to him :

“ I wonder if I shall ever know anything

about the real *you*, Signor Gray? How I wish you would tell me your real history—I mean *all* that happened before you began to travel—for of course *there* is the story of Sylvester Gray.”

“Heaven forbid!” he would reply, and walking to the window would look out into the *cortile* where the Princess’s cats remained faithful to their hopes of some-day catching one of the gold-fish that wandered round below them in the basin of the fountain.

“Yes,” the Princess used to answer; “the tone and gesture are most dramatic, and would have impressed those other women; but they don’t impress me. I want history and not theatricals. Come! why do you not some day throw off that handsome impenetrable mask of yours, and if you really love me as you say you do, do what I ask, and tell me something about yourself?”

“There is nothing to tell, *Princesse*,” he would say half-bitterly. “I have wandered about the world and have acquired the art of impressing the weak-minded by means of what

you are pleased to call my histrionic talent ; but it is nothing, and need not disturb you so long as you are not deceived by it. Story—God bless you—like Canning’s knife-grinder, I have none to tell you.”

“ Ah ! Bah ! I am tired of all that. Stop, I beg of you.”

And so it would go on. It seemed as if each were matched against the other in a contest of badinage, in which neither would give in, and neither would confess to defeat ; and this strange friendship continued until the end—the end which came so tragically, so unexpectedly.

Early one morning Sylvester rose and made his way to St. Peter’s to listen to the mass in the Capella del Coro. His heart was full to breaking with his love for the Princess Stella, and his despair of ever convincing her of its existence. Throughout the service he sat revolving in his mind the problem which had led to the conversation I have recorded with his American friend—should he tell her that history of his or no ?

It was the only thing left, his disease was desperate and required a remedy like unto it. At any rate it would have one of two effects: either she would pity and love him, at last understanding the motive of his strange nomad life; or else the sympathy she felt for him now, would be turned to hate, into despite, and it would all be over—this uncertainty, this heart-breaking struggle to convince her of a love that she would fain, but could not, believe in.

He came to a decision suddenly that afternoon, whilst he stood before her in her dainty boudoir, engaged in the old, hopeless effort.

“Why can’t you convince me?” she had said for the hundredth time.

“I will tell you,” said he, turning suddenly and standing over her; “I will tell you. It is because my love is pollution to a woman so fair, so pure, as you, and though you cannot tell *why*, you feel it to be so; your womanly *flair* tells you of it. Listen! I—I, Sylvester Gray, the gay, the *insouciant*, the *debonnair*, am a coward, a scoundrel, a

criminal too vile for expression. I told you one day, that I have loved one woman before you, only one, and that was ten years ago. Well, I loved her wildly, passionately; and she trusted me with her very soul. As a return, the trust she reposed in me I betrayed. I shattered her belief in manhood, in honor, in myself, and we parted, not in hatred, but in dull, cold disillusionment on her part, in passionate remorse on mine. She never recovered from the shock; she died soon after, and left me behind to wander through the world, to continue as I had begun, a destroying fiend. And it is the knowledge of this that you instinctively have, that holds you from me; the face of that dead girl stands between us, and it is only your sweet hands that can lay those reproachful eyes at rest."

"Go on, tell me everything—just as it happened."

"So be it."

\* \* \* \* \*

And he told her of our schoolboy days at Harrow, of his love for Evelyn Wooster, and



of her stay at Idlesse ; told her the events of that stay which I had only been able to surmise dimly, as some horrible nightmare, and which I never knew till I heard them from the lips of the Princess Stella.

He told his story to the bitter end, extenuating nothing, excusing nothing, told it with a dramatic force that was terrific, with a pathos that was infinite, and at the end sank into a low *fauteuil* before her, watching her to see the effect it had produced upon her.

She had hidden her face in her hands during the recital, and when he became silent, she slowly lowered them and looked up ; he was lying before her in one of the old theatrical attitudes she knew so well, a strained look of pleading in his eyes, his hands convulsively clasped before him.

And suddenly, in the midst of her horror, and pity, and grief for the man before her, as she gazed at him, there came over her, like a wave, the revolting thought that even this was all a *pose*, a superb dramatic effort, conjured up as a last resource to impress her

and persuade her, against her better judgment that he loved her. As the idea took possession of her mind, her face gradually hardened once more, and at last the lips began to wreath themselves into the little mocking smile. He was watching her ;—turning white to the roots of his hair, he started to his feet and exclaimed :

“ Well ! what do you think of me now ? ”

“ What do I think of you *now*, Signor Gray ? Why, as a man, exactly what I did before ; but as a *raconteur*, as an *improvisatore* of the most harrowing dramatic narratives, my opinion of you is, if possible, vastly increased.”

“ Good God ! what do you mean ? ”

“ Why—I mean that you have rivetted my attention for a couple of hours with one of the most thrilling romances I have ever heard ; but you don’t suppose, do you, that I *believe* it ? Cielo ! Signor Gray, I know you too well. Ah, *mon ami*, *mon ami*, how you waste your talents ! ”

And she rose and turned away, and then

walking to the window, looked out into the court-yard.

The brass rings of her *portière* rattled, and she turned suddenly. Sylvester Gray was gone. She turned once more to the window and saw him stride through the *cortile*, and disappear through the *porte-cochère*.

The Princess Pamphila-Severi laughed softly.

“What a boy it is!” said she to herself.  
“At this time to-morrow he will come and begin all over again. How I love him! and how I wish he loved me as he declares he does!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Sylvester did not return next day. Early on the following morning I wrote her the following note from the Albergo Quirinale, whither, in the dual capacity of friend and doctor, I had been hastily summoned by Sylvester's body-servant:

“MADAME LA PRINCESSE:—I have a duty to perform by the direction of our friend, Sylvester Gray, in writing to inform you of his death,

which occurred during the night. He left instructions that you should be informed immediately, and it is in obedience to those instructions that I hasten to apprise you of this sad intelligence. *Aggredite l'assicuranza, etc.*

“JOHN TOMPKINS, M. D.”

Half an hour later, as I sat by the side of my poor, dead Sylvester, the Princess arrived. She stooped over and kissed the pale lips, stroking them gently with her fingers, and then, turning to me, she said :

“Tell me the *absolute* truth, doctor ; this death was—premeditated?”

“Madame,” I replied, “death resulted from an overdose of morphine, which Signor Gray had been taking for some nights to procure sleep. It may have been accidental, or it may have been premeditated ; a letter which was delivered to me this morning, containing his last instructions in case at any time he should die suddenly, and evidently written last night before he retired, points with terrible distinctness to the latter hypothesis.”

THE STORY OF A YOUNGER SON.



## THE STORY OF A YOUNGER SON.

*A Commonplace Romance.*

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### I.

GERVASE BRAYBROOKE was a younger son. True; but he did not look it.

To see him scouring the country on his crow-black mare, "Dynamite," both man and beast groomed to perfection, stopping here and there to exchange a few gracious remarks for the greetings of the cottagers and "retainers" of his father's estate, you would have said that he was some benevolent young Russian noble, paying a circular visit of princely patronage among his serfs

and other chattels. He was only twenty when I saw him first, but he had already that air of genial command that characterized him in after life, a manner which drew all hearts to him, but forbade the slightest approach to that familiarity which breeds contempt.

Sir Eric Braybrooke's place was in Warwickshire, and I am one of the enthusiasts who declare that Warwickshire is one of the most beautiful of the midland counties of England. Consequently, when my old school and college friend, Sir Eric, wrote to me, pressing me to "sport my oak" in Lincoln's Inn and, leaving the law behind, to come and vegetate in Warwickshire and recuperate my wasted tissues after an unusually hard session, I wrote back and told him that the moment the courts rose at the termination of the great case of Willoughby versus Willoughby (a cause "In Lunacy," which ended by nearly sending all parties concerned to keep the unconscious plaintiff company in his private



madhouse), I should bid farewell to Briefs, Cases for Opinion, Special Pleadings, and Drafts, and jump into the first train that left Euston for the Midlands, for Warwickshire, and for Kington.

In all Warwickshire, rich as it is in historical associations, with the birthplace of William Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon and the home of the Washingtons at Sulgrave, few villages are more interesting than Kington, which is situated within an easy walk of the field of battle at Edgehill, and is the hamlet where his sacred Majesty, King Charles, the martyr, remained for a while before and after that memorable fight. I had explored the whole country round, pretty thoroughly, with Eric Braybrooke, when we were boys at school together, and I had been invited to spend my summer holidays on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion at Braybrooke Hall. I had not been into Warwickshire since, and I looked forward to my visit to the old place every bit as much, now, looking ab-

sently out of the window of my chambers in Lincoln's Inn, with polished sconce and silver side whiskers, as I had, a quarter of a century before, when Eric and I walked up and down the towing-path at Eton, or discussed the glories of Braybrooke Hall, as we dressed after our matutinal swim at "Athens."

When, therefore, I had at last bidden my clerk "God speed" in starting for our respective holidays—well earned on both sides — and had reached Kineton after a somewhat complicated collection of "changes" on the London and North-Western Railway, it seemed to me on leaving the quaint little station that all the old landmarks were familiar to me; I went back twenty-five years at a bound, and, telling Sir Eric's coachman to take charge of my luggage, I set forth to walk the three miles which intervened between Kineton village and Braybrooke Hall.

About half a mile from the lodge gates of the Hall there was, I remembered, a gate

which opened upon a road that wound round among the Braybrooke woods. I determined to pass through it, and reach the Hall by the garden side, a way I remembered of old. As I approached it I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming up behind me, and just before I reached it, a solitary horseman passed me. As he reached the gate, he reined in his animal, a superb black mare, with some difficulty, and turning half round in the road, waited for me to come up with him. Thus I had an excellent opportunity of noting his appearance — which was that of the most prepossessing young man that I had ever seen. He was fair, with a young, boyish face that was singularly frank in its expression. His eyes struck me as being blue. His lithe young figure was shown off to advantage by his tightly-fitting riding suit of dark blue cord, and as he sat on his horse, I could not help feeling proud of him as an English boy, and almost wished that I had married all those years ago when—but never mind.

As I came up he saluted me military-fashion with the butt of his riding whip and said in a soft musical voice:—

“Might I trouble you, sir, to open this gate for me; my mare is having a great game at my expense and won’t let me get off and open it for myself.”

“Certainly,” I replied, and as I did so, I added, “Does not this gate lead through the Braybrooke woods?”

“Yes,” replied the boy, “and if you’re going to Elverly, you’ll find it a short cut and a pretty walk, but bear to the right or you’ll not get to the house. Thank you very much; Good day, sir.” And with the words he lifted his hat and bowed in his saddle as if to a woman, gripped his mare with his knees, and swept off into the woods. I couldn’t help hoping as I walked through the old woods where I had rambled as a boy, that I should find out who the young fellow was. He was good to look at and I was glad I had met him.

Sir Eric Braybrooke was waiting for me

on the piazza in front of the drawing-room windows of the Hall. He made me welcome to his old Tudor mansion, and it was with a feeling of the most genuine satisfaction that I sat down with him, in the cosy room that had been set apart for my use, to indulge in a little chat on old times before dinner. We were to be a comparatively small gathering that evening; the majority of the guests were to arrive the next day; at present the house party consisted of Sir Eric and Lady Braybrooke and their sons Eric and Gervase, their daughter Miss Constance Braybrooke, Miss Rosamund Gilbert (a distant relation of the family, a *protégée* of Sir Eric's who had been educated with his children) Lord George Wilmyngton, and myself. Next day we were to be invaded by half-a-dozen others, so, as Sir Eric grimly remarked, we must make the best of our one quiet evening together. Thus posted, he left me to dress for dinner.

As a bachelor and a hard worker I dress quickly, and when I came downstairs, I

found myself alone in the drawing-room with a strange young woman, and a self-possessed withal. She was tall and dark, with the freshest of complexions and the most wonderful wondering eyes. She arose as I came into the room and looked an interrogation point at me. I concluded that she must be Miss Braybrooke, so I remarked:—

“Miss Braybrooke, I presume.”

“No,” replied she, “my name is Gilbert. I am related to the Braybrookes in a complicated manner which I could explain to you by means of a diagram, but I am afraid hardly without.”

“Pray, do not trouble on my account, Miss Gilbert,” I rejoined, and in two minutes we were the best friends in the world.

In a word, she was charming, and I was quite sorry when two young men in superlative evening dress entered the room, whom Miss Gilbert introduced as Mr. Gervase Braybrooke and Lord George

Wilmyngton. His lordship bowed and dropped into a seat beside Miss Gilbert; in Gervase Braybrooke as he extended his hand, I recognized my young cavalier of the afternoon.

"Surely, we have met before," said he, "and I must apologize for my unconcious discourtesy. Had I dreamt for an instant that you would walk up, instead of driving from the station, I might have guessed your identity, and should have walked up with you. As it was, my mare Dynamite was giving me momentary proof of my discernment in my choice of a name for her, and I was only conscious of having begged a gentleman to act as lodge-keeper for me, and of having ridden on."

I was delighted to find him so soon, especially as I found that he would bear a closer inspection. The next moment Lady Braybrooke and her daughter, a beautiful blonde of nineteen, came into the room, followed by Sir Eric and his eldest son, who were apparently engaged in close con-

fabulation on some matter of importance;—and then we filed in to dinner.

It did not require much legal discernment to see how matters lay among the party assembled in the oak-panelled dining-room of Braybrooke Hall. Evidently the family were all on the most friendly terms with one another, and from Sir Eric down to Constance, were as light-hearted a crew as could be imagined—with the exception perhaps of the elder son, Eric, who struck me as being reserved almost to the verge of gloom. Miss Rosamund Gilbert was the brightest perhaps of us all, but it was plain from the way she continually flung the ball of conversation into his lap, that Gervase was her favorite, a fact which, not escaping the observation of Lord George Wilmyngton, seemed to cause that gentleman no small annoyance.

After the ladies had left the table, the three young men immediately excused themselves and strolled out through the open windows of the dining-room to



smoke a cigarette, with the permission of the ladies, on the verandah. Sir Eric and I remained behind to talk over old times together. From the past, we gradually came to the present, and from generalities we arrived at particulars. It seemed that there had been a boy and girl attachment between Gervase and Rosamund Gilbert all their lives. They had been brought up together, and Sir Eric only awaited the time when Gervase should have hewn out a position for himself in the Indian Civil service, to receive his beautiful *protégée* into even more close relationship with his family. It was not an engagement; oh, no! nothing formal or definite, but an understood thing—an understood thing. But the Braybrooke estates were strictly entailed, and descended with the title to the eldest son, the serious Eric, a young man of whom I am inclined to think his father stood somewhat in awe—anyhow I fancied I detected a regretful ring in the worthy baronet's voice when he told me

the time was drawing near when Gervase must join the Civil Service Corps in India and be away from Braybrooke for four or five years.

Somehow *I* felt sorry too, but I was glad that these two young people who had individually created such a favorable impression upon me, were united by a bond so tender as that of the "understanding" that existed between them.

We two old gentlemen did not go out on the verandah, but rejoined the ladies by way of the drawing-room. Eric Braybrooke was sitting by his mother. Lord George Wilmyngton stood by the piano listening to Constance Braybrooke, as she dreamily touched the keys, and crooned snatches of old English ballads. The other two were nowhere to be seen.

"Where are Gervase and Rosamund?" inquired Sir Eric.

"Oh! they're walking round and round as usual," answered Miss Braybrooke from the piano,

The next moment the pair in question appeared arm-in-arm in the open window, the girl's white frock standing out against the blackness of the garden beyond, and the boy rendered the more conspicuous as he stood by her side, his black dress suit thrown up by the whiteness of his waistcoat and shirt-front. What a handsome picture they made, to be sure, as they stood there! She had thrown a white goat-wool shawl, such as the women weave on the Pyrennean slopes, round her shoulders and over her head, and it made a charming framework for her lovely face. They stood there looking in at us, as if they were defying critical examination, and indeed well they might, for it would, I think, have been hard to find in all humanity a more perfectly matched couple. I glanced round the room to see what was the impression that the picture made on the rest of the company. In Lady Braybrooke's expression there was an air of conscious pride, in that of her daughter the most genuine

admiration and affection; Lord George Wilmyngton had turned a shade paler, and was nervously biting the end of his moustache; Eric Braybrooke alone looked on as if he was amused by the scene; as for me, I turned and looked at Sir Eric—he caught my glance of enquiry and smiled affirmatively.

I was glad—very glad that it was so.

“Well,” said Gervase after a pause, “why don’t you ask us to come in? we’ll come if we’re invited, otherwise we shall continue our promenade and philosophical confab’. We’ve been discussing a most intricate point; and that is, supposing the existence of two people who are as much in love with one another as Rosa and I are, in the event of the girl going off and marrying some other fellow, can they remain as good friends as ever, afterwards, without making fools of themselves and one another? Now *I* say they could, and Rosa says they couldn’t. *I* say that if Rosa goes and marries my hated rival,

whoever he is, I shall come and live with them and be just as jolly as ever; and she says she would leave orders with the servants to say "Not at home" whenever I called, and that if I was always about the place, it would end in our falling in love in real earnest. What do you think, Wilmyngton?"

"Well," replied his lordship, "I think there is very little doubt that you would end by falling in love with Miss Gilbert, but I don't see that it need necessarily be reciprocal!"

"But I think," said Lady Braybrooke, "that you might do something better than waste your time talking such nonsense. Anyhow you are *not* going to walk about any more to-night in the damp."

"You, none of you, ask me my opinion, I observe!" said the elder brother, putting down the book he had taken up, "and as you don't seem to want it, here it is: I think that if a man sees too much of a woman he has been in love with before she

married some other fellow, either they will fall in love over again, only more so, or else familiarity will breed contempt, and they will come to the conclusion that they can't imagine what they ever saw in one another."

And amid the silence which followed, Eric Braybrooke got up and left the room.

"Your elder boy is no fool," remarked I *sotto voce* to Sir Eric.

"No, indeed!" replied his father drily.

And then the conversation became general on other subjects. Lord George took a seat next to Miss Gilbert, and Gervase came over to persuade his sister to play some favorite tunes for him.

I retired comparatively early that evening, and did not join the rest of the men in the smoking-room; consequently I was down early next morning, and stepping out into the garden, the first object that met my eyes was Gervase dressed in white flannel, superintending the marking out of the tennis court. Close by, in a hammock

swung between two trees, lay Rosamund Gilbert, clad also in the whitest and freshest of frocks, swinging lazily to and fro in the morning sun, while she kept up a brisk fire of conversation, chaff, and repartee with Gervase.

As I made my appearance Gervase advanced across the lawn to greet me, and Rosamund cried out across the court:—

“Good morning, Mr. Cornell, do you mind my not scrambling out? It is so ungraceful. Come and be poetical; here you see milk in a tin bowl—only one bowl for the three of us—with the dust and hairs and leaves and things not strained off; gooseberries, peaches, and grapes, with earwigs crawling about them. Peter and I—I always call Gervase, Peter, because he’s the only person who carries keys of all the gates about with him—Peter and I always do this, we get so awfully hungry before breakfast. You can sit on the end of the hammock if you think it is safe, but *I* should advise you to take Peter’s coat,” and so saying, she

flung me Gervase's white flannel coat, which she had been using as a pillow, and which I spread out on the grass and sat down upon.

To cut a long story short everything that I saw of this inseparable couple, I liked more and more. Whenever the girl was not with Gervase, Lord George was her devoted cavalier, and it was plain that she only had to say "yes" to become Lady George Wilmyngton; but it was equally plain that she was *not* going to say "yes," and often when I saw his lordship biting his moustache as he watched the pair go off demurely arm-in-arm to lose themselves in the woods, I used really to pity the young fellow, who loved Rosamund Gilbert so deeply and so hopelessly.

One day I had a talk to Sir Eric about it; he seemed to take it all as a matter of course, and was inclined, as so many country gentlemen seem to be, to bother very little about the affairs of other people so



long as they did not directly and personally concern himself.

“Oh!” replied he, in answer to a question of mine, “Gervase and Rosa understand one another perfectly, and when he comes back from India they’ll be married—they’ve plenty of time before them; she’s only seventeen—yes, he is twenty—I shall be glad to see them married, for she’s a sweet girl, and he’s as good as gold, I believe.”

I was almost annoyed that the engagement was not formally expressed between them; I had seen so many young hearts separated by a misunderstanding which could not have occurred had they been bound together by a definite promise given and received. Alas! I believe it occurs every day. A boy and girl are thrown together, brought up together, are “the best friends in the world”—the very freedom with which they avow to the world and to themselves their unclouded affection for one another, the matter-of-course nature of

their companionship seems to forbid the suggestion of anything deeper, tenderer, warmer. Then, one day, they suddenly discover that there is something unexpressed between them; in a word, that though it is not blazoned forth to the world, they *do love* one another, and then, though, as before, nothing is said on the subject, their friends say, "they understand one another." It is the girl who finds this out first, as a rule, and it is her sudden new consciousness of manner, a word in a conversation that suggests the true state of affairs to the boy, and then—though as before, no actual word of love passes between them—their sympathy becomes more tender, more delicate, more conscious of its own existence; they assume little proprietary airs with regard to one another, and everything seems wrapped in an indolent, treacherous calm.

Whenever I see a little drama of this kind being played between two young people, I am reminded of some verses that

were written once under similar circumstances by a young poet of my acquaintance, which are entitled "Sympathy," and which run as follows:—

" Hush! do not speak, lest the spell that enthalls us  
Break like the smouldering spark into flame.  
Still!—Make no sign, lest the small voice that calls us  
Fill this whole planet, for me, with your name.

" Absence is death, to be near you is madness.  
Madness or death? which of these will *you* choose  
Say, what is death to the anguish, the sadness  
Of finding a life which we find but to lose.

" Hush! if you speak, you'll drag down to existence  
A spirit that hovers o'er our twin souls above;  
Which will make us its own with a tender persistence,  
That wakes us at last, but to say:—'*This is love.*'"

And so it goes on, this deadening, isolating thing known as "an understanding," until one of two things happens. Either, something calls the boy or the girl away;—if it is the girl, it is generally another lover, and this brings matters to a head, their love becomes expressed and consummated; if

it is the boy, it is generally a call to his work in the world, and too often he goes off with a smile on his lips and words of hope on his tongue, to a life full of incident and occupation, and leaves her to what:—to her own lonely thoughts, and to wonder if he ever really loved her.

Or, the more subtle, the more insidious, the more deadly poison of familiarity—of *custom*,—of *satiety*—creeps into the cup of their contentment, and unless they are separated at once, the sweets of sympathy become changed into the acids of antipathy, and they part coldly, by common consent, with an uneasy feeling of relief which neither can account for, and of which both feel ashamed. “An understanding” is like a pinch of powdered sugar flung into a goblet of champagne—at first it froths up with the excitement of chemical combination, but with each successive pinch the everescence is less and less pronounced, till at last the surface becomes clear, and the sugar which has been thrown

in lies a sticky cloying mass at the bottom of the cup.

Or, again—since we are analyzing the matter—let us take another simile which too often illustrates the termination of a boy-and-girl attachment, or of what is mis-called, for want of a better term, a “platonc friendship.” Have you ever seen an insulated metal globe, highly charged with *positive* electricity placed close to another charged *negatively* in a locality where the air is dry? So long as the atmosphere remains as it was, the globes remain highly charged with mutually attractive electricities. Prêsently, however, the air becomes warmer and moister, and, acting inductively upon one another, the globes become gradually “discharged” by one another’s proximity. No spark, no report, but imperceptibly each has taken from the other all that it can give, and when the electrician turns his attention to them, he finds them absolutely normal; neither of them attracting or being influenced by the other. And so,

alas! too many of these pure boy-and-girl loves come to imperceptible and untimely grief. Let them be brought together, say I! let us hear the "snap!" as the spark flies, let their affection be acknowledged honestly, before God and before man!

Pardon me this digression—but it has been germane to my story, believe me. Thoughts such as these continually occurred to me during the bright summer weeks which I spent at Braybrooke Hall, and one morning, coming down early, I found Gervase standing on the gravel walk throwing pebbles at Rosamund's window to awake her. As I reached him, a white arm waving a handkerchief appeared from behind the curtains. "All right," shouted he, and then turning to me, he said, "That's the signal by which I know that she's not only awake, but out of bed."

"What friends you are!" said I, and he replied enthusiastically:

"Yes—we are. She's the sweetest and the cleverest and the handsomest girl I

ever knew, and I don't know what my life would have been without her."

"And when are you going to be married to one another?" I asked.

"Oh! that won't be till I come back from India. Until I'm 'something' over there, I can't afford a wife, you know; but she'll wait for me, Mr. Cornell, she'll wait for me."

"But it is not a definite, absolute, *engagement*, I think I heard your father say?"

"No, because, you see, I'm very young and so is she, and she's never seen any other fellow hardly. I should be very sorry to tie her down by any promise to me, before she's had an opportunity of seeing if she likes another fellow better; but if she's the girl I think and know she is, I don't believe anyone could make her happier than I could, and she knows it."

"Do you ever talk together of your future lives?"

"No; it isn't necessary. The present is so good and lovely, that all we care to know

about the future is that it will be just like the present. I haven't a thought in the world, Mr. Cornell, that isn't of her or that she doesn't share, and she knows it; what more can a man want?"

I couldn't help thinking that as a true friend of both of them, I should have wanted a good deal more, but it was unnecessary to say it, and I merely replied:—

"Well, my boy, I agree with you that she's a sweet and a charming girl, and I wish you every happiness for the future. If ever you want any other friend than your father—which Heaven forbid—remember that William Cornell of 50 Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, is ready and willing to do anything he can for you."

"Thank you," replied the boy, "thank you, Mr. Cornell. I hope the only claim I shall ever make on your friendship will be to ask you to rejoice with me in the happiness of my future. Do you see this half-opened rose? It is lovely as it is, is it not? Well that's our present; when it



opens fully, it will still be lovely, but in a different way—like this.”

And he spread open the unfolding petals with his fingers. A common mishap had befallen the poor rose; a second calyx and set of petals had sprouted inside the first. The rose would bloom, yes, and the inner rose would rival the outer one in sweetness; but neither could ever become perfect, though the imperfection would not become visible until the rose had become mature. A sharp contraction of the features revealed the sudden pang that shot through the boyish heart at my side, as he flung the imperfect flower into a rubbish-basket at his feet.

At that moment Rosamund Gilbert joined us, her freshness and loveliness putting to shame the clematis she had stuck carelessly into her waist-belt. Gervase glanced at me with a curious, almost aged look, and then took the hand I extended to him and shook it silently. Next moment Rosamund had taken me by one arm, and him by the

other, and together we strolled down to the stream for a row before breakfast.

## II.

"HULLO! Gervase," said Sir Eric, as we took our seats at the breakfast table, "here's an evil-looking letter for you from the Civil Service Commission; it looks suspiciously to me, as if it meant that you've got to go up to town and 'try again' for your examination."

"Indeed," said Rosamund, with quick indignation, "there's no possibility of anything of the kind. It is to say that Peter's come out at the head of the list. Ploughed indeed!—the idea!"

Meanwhile the boy had opened the letter and was reading it. I was not the only person at the table who anxiously watched his face as he did so, and whose heart sunk within him as he noticed the hardening of his features, and the sudden pallor which overspread them. I could see an anxious

look come into Sir Eric's and Rosamund's face, as the former said cheerfully:—

“Well lad, what is it? ‘pass’ or ‘plough,’ eh?”

“Pass,” said the boy drily, and did not add another word as he pocketed the envelope.

Rosamund had turned and was talking at the moment to Lord George Wilmyngton, and without looking round at Gervase who sat on the other side of her, held out her left hand for the letter. She had a little imperious way of demanding his letters when they were interesting, and he always handed them over at once if she wanted them. This morning he did not do so, and with a little impatient contraction of the eyebrows, she half turned her head and said:—

“Give it me directly.”

“No,”—quite shortly.

“Peter!” she exclaimed in mock warning, “how dare you?”

“I don't want to show it to you, that's all,” he replied.

She turned her lovely eyes full<sup>d</sup> on him, and with almost a tone of annoyance in her voice—for no woman likes a sudden mutiny against her acknowledged authority in public, especially when “the public” means other women—remarked gravely:—

“Peter, I believe that letter says you’ve been ‘ploughed,’ and you’re ashamed to confess it before everybody;” and with these thoughtless words she turned and continued her conversation with Lord George.

Gervase Braybrooke flushed scarlet, and then turned deathly white. I expect that this was the first time in his life that any one had ever suggested the possibility of his telling a lie. Thoughtless words indeed! but in that second of time the whole drama of Gervase Braybrooke’s life in the future was plotted out, and the curtain fell on the first act.

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He talked on indifferent subjects for the rest of breakfast time, but I felt that there

was something on the boy's mind. After breakfast he and I walked out together, and were immediately joined by his father. As Sir Eric came up, Rosamund and Lord George Wilmyngton passed us and disappeared in the direction of the conservatories.

"Well," said his father, "what is it, my boy?"

"Why, look here, governor; this is rather unexpected; the notice of my qualification is accompanied by a letter from the civil service commission which says that a rather good appointment has suddenly fallen vacant on the vice-regal staff in Bombay. The Duke of Westhampton has asked for it for me, and has got it; they want to know if I will take it up and report for service *at once*. It's a glorious chance, isn't it, but it means leaving you and home—and all of you—so suddenly—what shall I do?"

"Why, my dear boy," replied Sir Eric, as he finished reading the letter, "there

can't be two ideas on the subject. You have one of the finest openings any young fellow has ever had. Of course we must accept it, and we will both of us write letters to the Duke, thanking him for his interference on our behalf. I'll just go in and talk to your mother about it." And the worthy baronet went into the house.

At this moment Rosamund came running back to the house;—alone. She was passing us without stopping, when Gervase said to her:—

"Do you want to know what my letter from the Chief said, Rosa?"

"Thank you, I wouldn't pry into your private affairs for the world. Besides, I can't wait now, I want some scissors, and Lord George is waiting for me in the conservatory."

And with that she skipped into the house. A look of intense pain came over Gervase's face as he looked in the direction in which she had disappeared.

"Go after her," said I to him, "and tell her your news."

"No, I don't see why I should; if she doesn't choose to wait, she can't want to know."

"But Gervase," I insisted, "surely she has a *right* to know; you won't let her suffer my boy,—as she will suffer—for any foolish mistake, even if she herself has committed it."

A softer light came into his eyes and he made a half movement as if to turn and go into the house after her, when suddenly she tripped out by another window further down the verandah and disappeared once more in the direction of the conservatories. Gervase's face hardened again as he replied to my remark:—

"No, Mr. Cornell, she has no *right*; you know we are not engaged formally to one another—she has a loophole of escape;" he added bitterly, "and if she chooses to take advantage of it in favor of Lord George, you don't suppose that I—I, her best *friend*—would seek to stand in her way."

"But, my dear boy," I began, but he

stopped me with a little gesture of his hand, and a little proud toss of his head.

"Pardon me," said he, "if I say, Mr. Cornell, that the subject is not one which I am in a position to discuss. Excuse me, will you? I have to spend the day in making arrangements for my departure.

"But goodness me, you are surely not off in such a hurry as that."

"I am afraid so, the Civil Service is a kind of Pool of Bethesda, you know. It is seldom troubled, and when it is, the man who has anyone to help him to take advantage of the opportunity, is the man who reaps the benefit—but he must be on the spot to take his place the moment he has his chance. *Au revoir!*"

And so he left me.

My thoughts were none of the pleasantest as I walked down to the river-side. It was hardly a river, perhaps; more properly speaking, it was a rivulet which wandered through the grounds and disappeared into the Braybrooke woods, to join the Avon



somewhere far beyond them. When I reached it, I found Constance Braybrooke and a young artist, who was one of the house-party, making sketches of a bend where the pollard willows bowed down in homage to the Naiads of the stream, as an occasional kingfisher would dart out of the scented rushes in pursuit of the too venturesome minnow.

"Where is everybody?" I demanded comprehensively of Miss Braybrooke.

"Oh!" replied she, "most of them are off to Warwick to see the castle and its peacocks. Eric and Professor Whitridge have started for Edgehill, where the Professor, I believe, fancies he will find Round-head helmets and Cavalier buckles lying about; Rosa and Lord George have gone off fishing in the boat; and as Gervase isn't with Rosa—for a wonder!—I can't tell you where *he* is."

"I thought Gervase was going fishing with Miss Gilbert," said I.

"So did I," replied the girl; "but they've

had a tiff, I think. They're always having them, though the effects are not lasting. I always tell them that one of these days they'll hurt one another in real earnest, and not get over it."

"Heaven forbid!" I ejaculated involuntarily.

And then I wandered away down the side of the stream into the wood, where I lost myself till lunch-time. After lunch I settled myself in the library with Marcus Aurelius, and saw no more of Gervase—or indeed of any of them—till dinner-time.

The party had assembled in the drawing-room, and dinner had been announced, when Lady Braybrooke suddenly said:—

"Why, where are Rosa and Lord George?"

The missing couple answered the question by suddenly appearing in our midst, dressed as we had seen them last at breakfast.

"We just looked in," said Miss Gilbert, "to say 'don't wait dinner'; we'll be down

directly; we lost ourselves, or we should have been home hours ago!"

And they disappeared again, leaving us bewildered at their sudden apparition. The fish had hardly been served when the girl appeared "*en toilette*"; and as she took her place by Gervase, with Lord George Wilmyngton's empty seat on the other side of her, broke into a voluble explanation of their truancy. They had sculled down stream, having glorious sport all the way, and it was long past lunch-time before they thought of turning back. Then they had missed their way at a fork of the stream, had taken the wrong side, and had finally landed miles away from home, and had walked across to Braybrooke Hall, hungry, tired, and crowned with piscatorial victory. As the girl finished her recital, Lord George entered and took his seat, and as he did so Gervase broke the silence for the first time by saying:—

"You seem to have had a hard day, Wilmyngton, but I don't pity you, for Rosa

keeps one up to the mark and makes the time fly, doesn't she?"

"Yes," replied his lordship, "I congratulate myself on our mistake; for my part I never passed a pleasanter day in my life."

"Nor I either," said Rosamund, a little defiantly, I fancied.

And then the conversation became general. Rosamund and Gervase talked together most of dinner time, but it was not the merry confidential chatter that they usually kept up right through the meal. At dessert, Sir Eric surprised us by tapping the table with the handle of his knife, and saying suddenly:—

"I think we ought to drink Gervase's health—he is on the high road to fame and fortune—but I am sorry to say he leaves us to-morrow."

I saw Rosamund Gilbert turn white for an instant; and I saw too that Gervase, glancing quickly in her direction, also noted her change of color; but his face did not soften as he nodded all round the table at

the various members of the party as they wished him "good luck."

Rosamund alone did not participate in the toast; she merely played with her glass and smiled as if she had been assisting at a little comedy; only I noticed, as she lifted her menu to look at it by way of a diversion, that the leaf of card-board shook as if it had been a living leaf in an autumn breeze. Soon after the ladies had retired, Gervase rose and left the rest of us alone, leaving the dining-room by the window and disappearing across the lawn into the blackness of the night. As soon as Sir Eric made a move, I followed in the direction the boy had taken, and presently seeing the tiny "*phare*" of a lighted cigarette across the rosery, I strolled round the grass walks between the rose-beds to join him. As I turned a corner and approached the seat where I knew Gervase was sitting, there was a sudden *frou-frou* of skirts, and he was joined by Miss Rosamund, who exclaimed:—

"Oh! Peter, why *didn't* you tell me about it?"

"My dear child," replied Gervase, "I don't want to bore you with my private affairs, and you don't care about knowing them—you said so yourself this morning. I thought, of course, you knew by this evening—I should have thought that this would have been part of the brilliant flow of Lord George's conversation during eight hours. He can probably tell you more about it than I can, as it is his father who has cleared me out of the way for his son, by getting me this appointment.—No, my girl, there's nothing more to be said on the subject; do you object to my cigarette?"

There was an instant's pause, and then the girl answered icily: "No, I don't mind tobacco, but it's too cold for me to stay here. No! don't come back to the house with me; I'd rather go alone—as I came—and you must have a good deal to think about. Good-bye for the present."

And so she left him.

I sprang forward and exclaimed: "Go after her, Gervase, remember what I said this morning—you are making a dreadful mistake which may ruin your whole lives; go after her, my boy."

"No," replied he, with his little proud toss of the head, "I refuse to cringe to any woman that treats me as if I were a child of seven. She has had eight hours of Wilmyngton,—let her get the full particulars from him."

He was immovable, and presently he left me and I returned to the drawing-room. Miss Gilbert, I was told, had retired to her room, as she was tired after her long day in the open air. The rest of the party were sitting around—as country-house parties will do—in groups, chatting and telling stories. Gervase and his father were closeted together, going over papers of one kind and another connected with his appointment, and I did not see them again till they joined us in the smoking-room after the ladies had retired. The conver-

sation not unnaturally turned on Gervase's departure, which was to take place early next day, the nature of his future occupations, and the date of his probable return. It seemed that in all probability four or five years at least must elapse before he saw England again. He spoke of his absence seriously and unreservedly, but with a quick cheerfulness that showed that at any rate he appreciated the opportunity that had been offered him of winning his spurs in the employ of his government.

Bright hopes! Happy future! Ah, it is good to be a man! Who was it that said that the next best thing after not having been born at all, would have been to have been born a woman? He was mad or spoke heedlessly. Gervase Braybrooke was twenty, handsome, and a gentleman to the backbone; he had passed all the examinations which had been his *bêtes noires* throughout his school days, and which had earned for him the pity of his female relations, whose immunity from "exams" he



had so heartily envied; and now, by the accident of his birth, not being like his elder brother, an independent gentleman, the Duke had interested himself to obtain for the younger son of his old friend, a staff appointment of importance close to the person of Her Majesty's Viceroy. Laurels to win, a position to conquer, a reputation to earn, and glory and renown in the future a visible goal. Ah! it is good to be a man! And Rosamund Gilbert—matchless specimen of womanhood, as he of his own sex, having the same,—nay, on the ground of her prospective motherhood of men as good as he, having *better* claims on humanity at large,—what had she in the immediate future, whilst he was away fighting the battle of life on the stage of government? Nothing! She had only to sit down and wait—to wait, whilst every day her beauty became less fresh, less bright, and her enjoyment of life became less keen and less minute. Ah! it is *good* to be a man. Woman! Woman! we bow before you, and

kiss your hands in token of our submission to your will; often—very often—our destinies are moulded by you; sometimes for evil, but more often for good; we strive to please you in all the small things of life, our going-out and our coming-in depend upon your sovereign will and pleasure; the fashion of our cravats and the intonation of our voices; but how is it when the world of men calls us to fill our allotted space in the universe as thinkers and workers?—how is it in the large events of life? the things which mould the destinies not only of ourselves as individuals, but of Humanity? Ah! then!—these things are not for women's thoughts! Get you to your needle-work, to your flower-garden, to your book of fairy tales, and to your instruments of music. Maybe, when we have *settled* the matter, we may speak to you of it again, and tell you *what we have done* for you. Ah! Ah! it is *good* to be a man!

Next morning Rosamund Gilbert did not come down to breakfast. She was not

feeling well, Lady Braybrooke told us, but would be down to see Gervase off. This was a ceremony which took place at eleven o'clock; we all assembled in the hall and on the portico, and Gervase walked about seeing to the final embarkation of his luggage and talking to us all in turn. Rosamund was there, and as bright and cheerful as any of us, keeping up a constant ripple of chaff and repartee with "Peter," as he went from group to group. At last the supreme moment arrived. Gervase looked very grey and determined, but got through it manfully. He said "good-bye" to Rosamund last—with the exception of his father, who saw him off at the station—and when he reached her, he took both her hands in his and raised them in turn to his lips. She was deathly pale, but she merely leaned forward and said:—

"Kiss me, Peter."

And putting one hand on her shoulder, he leant over and kissed the white lips that were turned up to his. I believe it was the

first time he ever kissed her—and the last. Then, with a sparkle in his eyes and a little husky tone in his voice, he turned, and waving his hat at us as we stood on the steps, he cried out:—

“Good-bye, all of you; good-bye, Braybrooke!” and as the dog-cart started down the drive, he turned and kissed his hand to one of the upper windows where Lady Braybrooke and Constance had probably stationed themselves to see the last of him, and to shed their tears together, unseen by the merry crowd in the hall.

When the dog-cart had disappeared, and I turned back into the hall, Rosamund Gilbert was no longer there, nor did I see her again until after lunch, when she came down looking a trifle pale but as cheerful as ever. It seemed to me that Lord George Wilmyngton was in better spirits this afternoon than I had ever seen him before. He threw himself eagerly into every plan that was proposed, and at last, when his good-humor had communicated itself to the

rest of us, and had dissipated, to some extent, the cloud which Gervase's departure had cast over us, it was with a strange sinking of the heart that I saw him and Rosamund stroll away down to the hammock where I had seen her the morning after my arrival, and arrange themselves to chat, she in the hammock and he on the ground, as Gervase had been wont to sit. I felt somehow—stranger though I was—that I had been left guardian of Gervase's interests, and after a while I strolled over in their direction. As I approached, Rosamund cried out:—

"Oh, Mr. Cornell, Lord George says Peter's going to be away for five years at least; it isn't true, is it?"

"Certainly it is true. Did you not know it—did he not tell you?"

"No, he didn't choose to tell me anything about his plans, and I didn't choose to ask him—or anybody else."

"I should have thought," remarked Lord George quickly, but meaningly, "that you

would have been the first person he would have come to tell *all* about them, Miss Gilbert."

"Gervase had something else to do," said she, flaming up immediately, as a woman always does if any man presumes to agree with her in abusing another of his sex, "than to loaf about all day talking to us girls about things we shouldn't understand. You don't quite see, Lord George, Gervase is not an 'idle man,' and has something to think about and to do in the world besides amuse himself. Help me out of the hammock, please, Mr. Cornell, I'm going to see what all the others are doing."

And with that she walked slowly across the lawn and disappeared into the house. In the drawing-room before dinner, I said to her:—

"Now that Peter's gone, the rest of us have a chance, I suppose. Will you waste half an hour after dinner walking with an old fellow like me?"

"Of course I will," replied she; and ac-

cordingly, as soon as I could get away after dessert, I came and found her waiting for me in the drawing-room.

We went out together into the early moonlight and walked slowly round the lawn, talking seriously as we went. I forget the arguments I used in begging her not to think ill of Gervase for having left her thus. I pointed out that the faults had been on both sides, that he had good reasons for not telling her of his departure in the presence of the company assembled at breakfast the morning before, that her refusal to listen when he had offered her his confidence on the verandah must necessarily have hurt him, and that the wound had hardly been healed by her excursion with Lord George, which had occupied the whole of the single, only, day which had elapsed prior to his departure. I told her that I thought he had had fair reason for what he had said in the evening in the rose-garden, and I begged her to write him a letter at once to the India Office, explain-

ing all the circumstances of the case, and asking his forgiveness for her fault whilst she freely pardoned his. She met all my reasoning with a woman's unreasonable but unanswerable objections, and finally, as we drew near the drawing-room windows for the last time, she said:

“No, Mr. Cornell, it is of no use; it is not as if we were engaged to one another. If we had been, he would not have treated me—and possibly I should not have treated him—in such a manner. I had no idea of the contents of his letter, and what I said at breakfast was merely angry chaff at his having mortified me before all the others, I *was* angry, but I would have given anything not to have been so horrid—but then—when I went after him—just fancy my doing such a thing—in the rose-garden, he was cruel and unkind, and it is *he* who ought to ask *me* to forgive him. I will *not* write to him unless he writes to me—and perhaps not then. He has his way to make in the world—“*—*” he doesn't want to be



hampered by me and my feelings. It was all very well when he had nothing to do; I was all very well to amuse an idle hour or two, but you will see how it is—now his life is full, how much shall *I* hear of him? A message in a letter to his mother, a newspaper paragraph if he distinguishes himself—as of course he *will*—and that will be enough for Rosamund Gilbert. Well, I'm not the first woman who has been in my position, Mr. Cornell—don't persuade me any more, my mind is quite made up. You are very good to have interested yourself in my affairs, and now I must go in, so *au revoir* Mr. Cornell, *au revoir*."

I was at Braybrooke for another fortnight and my visit was drawing to a close.

The evening before my departure I was sitting next to Miss Gilbert at dinner. Gervase Braybrooke had left London for Bombay the day before, and we all felt a little depressed by our sympathy with Sir Eric and Lady Braybrooke. Towards the end of dinner I said to her:—

"Did you write to him?"

"No," replied she.

"He has not written to you?"

"No."

"Nor sent any message?"

"He only asked Lady Braybrooke how I was, and said he hoped that if ever I could find a moment when I was not fishing and going long walks, I would remember his existence and write him a line to tell him what I am doing."

I returned to town next day.

### III.

THREE years passed during which I often met the Braybrookes and Miss Gilbert in London society. She never asked after Gervase, and it seemed strange to me that she did not, for the boy distinguished himself, as we all expected he would, and many of the daily and society papers spoke periodically of the good service he was doing his government as the right-hand man of the Viceroy, a position

he had acquired, notwithstanding his youth, by the charm of his manner and by his moral character, as much as by the energy and enthusiasm with which he entered into his work. Still, Miss Gilbert knew that I corresponded with him, for I told her so. Only once, however, had I led the conversation in the direction of Gervase and his work, and the girl had looked bored and uninterested, and finally had rather pointedly changed the conversation. I did not recur to the subject.

So beautiful a woman as Rosamund Gilbert suffered naturally from a superfluity rather than from a lack of cavaliers, and whether at afternoon receptions, in the Park, at Hurlingham, or at "crushes," the man who principally monopolized the attention of Miss Gilbert was generally a marked individual. Of all her white slaves, however, none was more assiduous in his attentions or more constant in his attendance than Lord George Wilmyngton; and really, when I think about it calmly, I do

not blame Rosamund for her toleration of his unflagging service. Setting aside his title and his wealth, Lord George was an English gentleman in the loftiest acceptation of the term; he was well-built and handsome, not troubled by a superfluity of brains—in fact Rosamund once confessed to me that she found him dull—but then he was supremely “good form,” and loved her honestly and humbly. Therefore, though it pained me terribly, for I was really *fond* of Gervase—I was hardly surprised when I read one day in the *Morning Post* that “a marriage had been arranged between Lord George Wilmynton, third son of the Duke of Westhampton, and Rosamund, daughter of the late Erskine Gilbert, Esquire, and niece of Sir Eric Braybrooke, *Bart*, of Braybrooke Hall, Warwickshire.” Three days afterwards the Indian mail brought a letter from Gervase announcing his intention of applying for leave, and of coming home the following summer for a few months.

I wrote back, warmly seconding his proposition, but in the same letter I sent him the cutting from the *Post*, and a little account of the engaged couple which I hoped would soften the blow to him—if blow it was to be. I hoped my letter would get to him before the account that was bound to reach him from home—and I believe it did. Meantime, whilst the preparations for the “Marriage in High Life” proceeded, his answer to my letter came swiftly across the hemisphere that divided us. \*

The young people had known one another for years, so there was no reason why the marriage should be postponed, and Gervase’s answer arrived about a week before it was to take place. It was short and to the point.

His plans had undergone a change since writing last. His Excellency had offered to send him on a mission of importance to Mandalay, and he had accepted the offer. It was a great chance for so young a man,

and he had determined to take advantage of it. He proposed to postpone his return for a further period of three years. By the time his letter reached me he was probably on his way to his post—if he was not already there.

And a week after that Rosamund Gilbert became Lady George Wilmyngton.

#### IV.

WHAT is it that Omar the Persian Tent-maker says of Time?

“The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on!” A hiatus of four years occurred in my story, and Time, as is his wont, had been quietly at work, making changes in our lives. Personally, I had stepped from the bar to the bench, and exchanged the curly wig of the Queen’s Counsel for the fuzzy head-gear of the Judge. Lord and Lady George Wilmyngton in their beautiful house in Picadilly, were among the most prominent members of London society. A terrible tragedy—the

simultaneous death in a railway accident of Sir Eric Braybrooke and his eldest son—had caused the baronetcy to devolve on Gervase, and Sir Gervase Braybrooke of Braybrooke Hall, Warwickshire, was one of the most prominent actors on the stage of Indian politics. He had accomplished his mission in Mandalay in a manner which had absolutely astonished the India office; He had been publicly complimented by both Houses of Parliament, and had ascended from the Companionship, to the Knight-Commandership of the Star of India; and even before he became Sir Gervase Braybrooke, Bart, he was already Sir Gervase Braybrooke, K. C. S. I., and England looked forward to a brilliant future career for him, as Her Majesty's Viceroy in India. His sister Constance had married, and was the proud mother of a baby-boy and of a not-quite-so-baby girl, and Lady Braybrooke had gone to live permanently in strict retirement in Braybrooke Hall.

One evening I was seated in my study,

busy revising the proof-sheets of a new edition of my work on "The Practice of the Court of Appeal," when my servant came and told me that a gentleman wished to see me who had refused to give his name, and was waiting in the drawing-room. I was somewhat annoyed at being disturbed, but came down immediately and found awaiting me a tall, bronzed, and distinguished-looking man, with rather grizzled blond hair, and an erect commanding figure. I bowed, and asked him to be seated.

"What!" exclaimed Gervase—for it was he—"am I so changed in seven years that you don't recognize me?"

Ah! but how glad I was to see him! and how I abused him for not having told me that he was coming. He had arrived the evening before and had determined to surprise me by swooping down upon me without a word of warning? I carried him away up to my *sanctum sanctorum* and after reviling him for having dined alone at the club, set him down in an arm-chair oppo-



site me, and for an hour we chatted and laughed like school-boys, he, the rising young Indian civilian whose habitual gravity was far beyond his years, and I, the grave Lord Justice of Her Majesty's Supreme Court of Judicature, old enough to be his father. I told him all the news that I had not included in my letters to him, and he gave me an outline of his adventures. I told him all I knew of Rosamund Wilmyngton and her husband, and he listened and asked questions in the calm and indifferent manner of a man who is dimly recalling events of his boyhood—events which seemed to him to be of paramount importance when they occurred, and who feels a mild surprise at the recollection of the effect they had upon him in those half-forgotten times. At last he said, in a reflective and half-amused tone of voice:—

“Well, well, I know that I left Braybrooke, and left England maddened, miserable, and sore at heart, and it took the whole of the first year that I never heard from her, to

realize that she had never really cared about me. It took the whole of the second year to accustom myself to the idea that the brilliant exquisite future I had mapped out for myself with her, was nothing but a boyish dream, and even during the third year, when I had applied for leave and was coming home, I knew that my love was not quite dead, and I used sometimes, when I sat in the Gardens at Bombay listening to the band after dinner, to imagine myself back in the old home, riding through the Braybrooke Woods upon Dynamite, with her at my side, touching an almost forgotten chord, and offering her a devotion which was no longer an outcome of the flattered vanity of a school-boy. But then—your letter came;—I knew that it was all over, and that I had only my work out there to fill the remainder of my life, and I gave up my leave when Lord B. offered me the residency at Mandalay, and have stifled the thought of her ever since. But notwithstanding all this, I've sometimes

vaguely wondered what she has grown to be—and now that I am in the old country again, I should *like* to see Rosamund Gilbert again. Egad! I wonder whether she would remember me!”

“Why, my dear fellow,” I replied, “if you really have left off caring about her, and if you really want to see her again, you can do so this very moment if you like. Mrs. Francis Jeune is giving one of her historic parties to-night, and we can look in for half an hour and then stroll down to the club. Lord George and she are certain to be there; all Diplomacy and all fashionable Bohemia meet there as regularly as clock-work, and though I hadn’t intended to go myself, I’ll take you there with pleasure, and Mrs. Jeune will be delighted to see you, both on your own account and mine. I’ll call at Claridge’s for you in half an hour, and we’ll go together.”

And so it was arranged. When I stopped my cab at Claridge’s Hotel for him, I found him ready for me, and certainly a more dis-

tinguished-looking man I have never seen, than Sir Gervase Braybrooke, with the Star of India on his dress coat, and the jewel of the order suspended by its ribbon beneath his white cravat.

Our hostess cordially extended to him the welcome that she always had ready for any living creature whose position and attainments rendered him worthy to become a member of the brilliant throng that habitually circulated from room to room in her house in Harley street; and almost the first person I saw as we entered the *salon*, was Lady George Wilmyngton. She was listening to Oscar Wilde's latest paradoxical axiom when I touched her shoulder and said:—

“Lady George, I have brought an old friend to claim acquaintance with you.”

She turned immediately, and, directing one searching look at the tall figure standing by my side, flushed crimson, then turned a shade paler than she had been before, put out both hands and exclaimed in a voice that was almost strangled:—

“Why, Peter!”

After that, a few commonplace words of surprise and satisfaction on both sides, and then Gervase offering her his arm, said:—

“Let us find a comparatively quiet place where we can talk.”

As they made their way to one of the smaller rooms, they passed Lord George, who was conversing with a member of the diplomatic corps in the passage. As they went by he turned an enquiring glance on his wife's escort, and she, looking up at him, said:—

“Don't you remember Gervase Braybrooke? Come into the little room with us, we are going to talk about old times.”

The two men greeted one another warmly, and half an hour afterwards, as I was gravitating in the direction of sandwiches and sherry with the Persian minister, I saw the three sitting together engaged in an animated confabulation.

Gervase Braybrooke and I, left together. We walked almost in silence as far as Oxford street, and then he said:—

“If you’ll excuse me, Sir William, I won’t come down to the club; I’ve had a hard day of it, and I think I’ll get home and turn in. I’ll come and see you again in a day or two.

And so he left me. A few days afterwards he came down to the Royal Courts of Justice late in the afternoon, and when the court rose he drove home with me. I couldn’t get him to stay to dinner. He was dining at Wilmyngton House.

v.

Three or four days later I was dining with Lord George Wilmyngton and his wife, a *partie carrée* of which Gervase was the remaining member. He seemed quite at home—quite one of the family—and, knowing as much as I did of the earlier relations of Gervase Braybrooke and Rosamund Wilmyngton, the easy familiarity which appeared to exist between them at this time perplexed me. Knowing Lady George to be a woman of the most ex-

quisite delicacy of mind and of the most unimpeachable refinement, and knowing Sir Gervase to be the very pink and pattern of perfect gentlemanly feeling and honor, I felt no uneasiness on the subject; but it seemed odd, after what he had told me the first evening after his return, that he could fall immediately into so apparently close a friendship—just as of yore—with his old sweetheart. When we left the house on the evening of which I am speaking, I said something to this effect, and asked him if Lady George had referred at all to the past.

“Not a word,” replied he; “we talk continually of the old days at Braybrooke, of the place itself, and of our rambles and rides together; but of our parting, never. She does not wish it, nor do I—all that is at an end henceforth and forever. I referred *once* to my last day at Braybrooke, but she silenced me coldly and peremptorily, and I was glad she did ‘so, she evidently does not look upon her conduct in the light that I

did, and do, and it is perhaps as well. It need not interfere with our friendship, which is still what it always was. Only those two days are out of our lives, and are as if we had never lived them.

Then he told me that during the day he had finished his official business at the India office for the present, and that early next morning he should start for Warwickshire to see his mother.

At the end of a fortnight he was back in town again. I did not see him for a day or two, and at the end of that time he told me that his plans were uncertain—that he did not know how long he should remain away from his post in India, and that his mother would most probably remain at Braybrooke for the rest of her life. He did not suppose that he would ever marry—the baronetcy was not restricted in its descent, and would devolve upon his cousin. At present—for the season at any rate—he should remain in London.

I knew that there was nothing to feel



uneasy about, but there was an uncertainty, a restlessness about Sir Gervase that I did not like. He seemed to be preoccupied, without having anything in particular on his mind, and I began to feel oppressed by an idea that his thoughts were beginning to run—oh! the pity of it!—on the “might have been.”

One evening I was sitting at work—as on that other occasion—when he was announced. The moment he came in, I knew that there was something wrong, that something had happened. Appearances were not deceptive.

“I have been with Lady George Wilmington this afternoon,” began he, “and we have had a talk over those two days.”

“Great Heaven!” thought I, “what is he going to tell me?”

“It was all a dreadful mistake. I misunderstood her, and she misunderstood me; she loved me as dearly as I loved her, only she was too proud to confess it, and I was too poor to ask it of her.”

"Go on."

"If I had written from London, even from India, it would have been all right, but like an idiot I thought she was in love with Lord George, and she imagined that I thought of nothing but my future—my brilliant future! Good God! how dearly I have bought it!"

"And you have explained these things to one another?"

"Yes."

"Gervase," I said very gravely, "I know you too well for a thought of the possibility of a dishonorable action on your part ever to cross my mind; but with all your knowledge of the world and with an experience of life such as few men have had at your age, you must realize that your position with regard to Lord George Wilmyngton's wife is a very difficult and a very strained one. What are you going to do?"

"Nothing!" said he, raising from his chair to pace backwards and forwards across the room. "Rosamund and I have

talked the matter over calmly, deliberately, dispassionately. We are both confident of ourselves and of one another, and you may be sure that no words of mine to her shall ever be such as her husband might not willingly hear. Our lives have been spoilt by a cruel mistake, but though she is Wilmyngton's wife, she shall never cease to be the dearest friend I have ever had, or shall ever have, in the world."

I felt that I was talking to a person very, very different to the boy of seven years ago, and I said but little more that evening. From that time onward Sir Gervase became Lady Wilmyngton's most constant attendant—whether at home or abroad. Lord George knew very well that his honor was in no sense in danger, and upon terms of the most intimate friendship the house in Picadilly became an ideal "*ménage à trois*." It was towards the end of the season that, one evening at a reception at the Foreign Office, I was chatting with one of the Colonial Secretaries of State, when Lady George passed on Gervase's arm.

"Do you know Braybrooke?" asked the Secretary.

"Very intimately," said I.

"Then, if you have any influence with him, get him back to India as fast as you can. That's a most rising young civilian being checked in the last round of a brilliant career. What does he want dangling after Lady George through a London season, when Theebaw is stirring himself up to give us trouble almost within walking distance of his post out there? I'm interested in that young man, Cornell, and I don't like the look of it—I don't like the look of it."

No more did I. And I determined to have a talk with Gervase about it. The end of the season was at hand, the festivities of the gay world were culminating in Goodwood, and already here and there one could see great houses whence the glory was departed until next season, and whose carefully closed and guarded windows announced the absence of "the

family." It was in the last days of July that Gervase came to take a little quiet dinner with me in my bachelor house in Eaton Place. During dinner I said to him:

"I suppose you will spend August with her ladyship at Braybrooke?"

"Well, no," he replied, "I shall go there later. I've promised to go down to the Wilmyngtons for August."

"Oh!"

After dinner, when the conversation had taken the confidential tone imparted by arm-chairs and the incense of "Henry Clays," I remarked in the most offhand manner in the world:

"And when do you return to India?"

"Never;" answered he.

"Good God! my dear fellow, what do you mean?"

"Well," said he, "I've thought it all over, and that's my decision. I didn't talk to you about it, Sir William, because I knew you'd argue the matter, and my mind

was made up. I sent in my papers some weeks ago, and by this time my successor is on his way out. They raised no end of a dust about it at the India Office; in fact, they refused to gazette my resignation until the other day, and even the Prince had a talk to me about it at Ascot, but I gave him my reasons, and H.R.H. was satisfied and didn't press the point. You see, I should never have gone into the Indian Civil Service if I had not been the governor's younger son; and now that the poor old gentleman and Eric are both gone, throwing the baronetcy on my shoulders, I feel in a manner bound to adopt the life which I should have taken up if I had been born heir to the title and estates;—only that I should have married Rosamund Gilbert. Braybrooke requires a master to look after it, and my mother is an old lady now, Sir William, my father's and brother's awful deaths aged her terribly, and Con's marriage has left her all alone in the world. So I shall keep my

rooms at the Albany and spend my time between them and Braybrooke; there's plenty to occupy my time here. Of course I know that I'm giving up a lot out in the Empire, and that many people who don't know my reasons will blame me; but you know them, and you know that they are valid, don't you?"

"Yes," I replied, "I know them, though you have kept silence as to the principal one. Now, don't answer me yet. As a Lord Justice I am accustomed to formulating cases with brutal precision, and your case is this: You—Sir Gervase Braybrooke, Baronet, Knight Commander of the Star of India, Her Majesty's Commissioner for the district of Bowghranee, in the province of Bengal, almost at the head of your profession at the age of eight-and-twenty, prospective Viceroy of the Empire of India, and sure of a peerage—have thrown all this to the winds and relegated yourself to absolute insignificance because you are in love with the wife of an old school "chum,"

the son of the man to whom you owe your position. I am old enough to be your father, I have watched your career as if you were my son, for I'm very fond of you, my boy, and I have been your father's intimate friend since we were both fourteen and went to Eton together. Therefore I am the only living man who has a right to hold the mirror for you to look at yourself in it. How do you like the picture?"

He rose from his chair and walked to the window. For a few moments he stood there looking out into the late summer twilight, at the people passing underneath in the street, twisting up his slightly grizzled moustache. At last he turned, and coming back, dropped once more into his chair opposite me.

"You have stated the case with startling truth," said he, "but there is nothing more to be said about it. The thing is *done*—finally, irrevocably. But don't imagine that I am going to spoil *her* life with my own. We are as good friends to-day as we were



in the old time at Braybrooke. Lord George, thank God, appreciates his wife at her true value, and trusts her as implicitly as she and I trust one another. Don't be uneasy about us, old friend. This is my life. I led off with a terrible mistake, the past has been bitter, but the present makes amends for it all, and I have no fear for the future."

The future! There was a certain grim humor in the way he spoke, but there was nothing to be gained by worrying him about it.

I changed the conversation.

## VI.

How unimportant the things which vitally concern ourselves seem to other people! It did not seem in the least to call for comment from the world that wherever Lady George Wilmyngton and her husband were to be seen, Sir Gervase Braybrooke was sure to be found not far off. Few remembered—and they only at rare intervals,

when he appeared decorated with the star and collar of the order—that the distinguished-looking young man was the hero of the Bowghranee insurrection. More than a year had passed since the conversation I have just recorded took place in my dining-room, when, one November evening, on my return from Court, I found a note from Gervase asking me if I could spare him the evening, and apologizing for not asking me to come to dinner. I had a vague, uneasy feeling that something was wrong, and I arrived at the Albany at about nine.

Gervase was sitting in a low arm-chair in front of the fire. On a little table beside him stood a pile of letters, which he was reading and burning as he read them one-by-one. A cold spasm of apprehension seized me, as I remarked cheerily:—

“Hullo! boy; burning love letters?”

“Yes; this kind of love letter:—‘Dear Peter, Come and dine with us to-night; seven punctually. Yours, Rosamund.’

Here's another. 'Dear Peter: George has got a box for "Frou-Frou" to-night; will you come? Yours, Rosa.' Nothing more than that, Sir William, but they are the only kind of love letters I have ever received." And as he spoke he flung the two notes he had read into the flames.

"My dear Gervase, for Heaven's sake what has happened?"

"Oh! Nothing much—nothing much. I'm only burning records of the past, and their ashes are the Ashes of the Future—mine and hers. Ashes—of the Future we look forward to so joyfully together, cantering through the Braybrooke Woods and across the Kineton meadows; I on Dynamite and she on Douchka. It's happened to a good many men before, and will happen to a good many again, to wake up and find that the sacrifices they have made have been in vain, and that all their plans have been based on an initial error. This life is like an astronomical calculation. You reckon the arrival of a comet or the

moment of an eclipse, and in stating the problem, start with an unnoticed error of a unit in a logarithm, or an accidental transposition of the ninety-ninth and hundredth decimal places in a fraction. The error is not noticed, and you build your calculation accordingly, and when your phenomenon takes place you find that there is a mistake of a million miles or so.

“But, Gervase, by all that’s horrible, please explain yourself.”

“Yes!—you of all people in the world have a right to ask for an explanation. What is it that your beloved Persian says:—

“The worldly hope men set their hearts upon  
Turn Ashes—or it prospers, and anon  
(Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty face)  
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone!”

“Well, well, that’s my case. I threw up everything a little more than a year ago, and devoted my life to a pure disinterested friendship for Rosamund Wilmyngton, and for a year I have been, as you know, her almost constant companion—with the full

approval of Lord George, who, thank God! has nothing to reproach his wife with. This friendship of ours was enough for me, it was my whole life—but with her it was different, though the difference only began to be dimly discernable at the beginning of last season. Her friendship for *me* raised the tone of my every thought, my friendship for *her* had, alas! the contrary effect. She ceased to require a friend, she wanted a ‘tame man;’ next she grew tired of the harmless necessary male, and insisted upon a slavery, a serfdom, and then my manhood revolted and I took a higher and more decided tone, and then she came down from the pedestal on which I had placed her, and began to employ all a woman’s coquetries to bring me to her feet. I was blind as long as I could be; deaf until the heart-stricken cry of Human Nature reached my ears, dumb until she ceased her silent questioning and paused for a reply, and got it!—a reply such as humbles a woman to the dust. In vain she endeav-

ored, and I too, to restore the footing of friendship on the even table-land of companionship; but the conviction grew stronger and more strong that the adamantine polish of our friendship had been worn off by the constant falling of the drop of acid—custom—upon its placid surface. I woke one morning from my peaceful dream to realize the grisly commonplace of the *fact* that I was *bored*. No sooner had I made the discovery than I strove eagerly by renewed attention to my ‘duties’ to conceal it—but there is nothing, as you know, that a woman’s unerring eye is quicker to perceive. It ended in her making ‘a scene’—an ordinary vulgar scene, like the heroine of a second-rate novel, or of a transpontine drama.

“In a word, we parted; parted not in anger, but in dull, cold, insurmountable indifference—and this heap of dusty ashes, extinguishing the fire that warms these lonely rooms of mine—the Ashes of our Future—are all that is left to me. I cannot take

up my Indian life again, my place is filled, and I cannot *begin* afresh. I go down to Braybrooke to-morrow, and then I shall spend the rest of my days as a plain, quiet country squire, as all the Braybrooke baronets have been. My work in life now is to take care of my dear mother as long as she is spared to me, and to try and forget these wasted years."

So this was the end. I sat with him for a little while, and then left him. Save at rare intervals, when he comes up to town, I have never seen much of him since, and he has never referred to his boyhood and the years he passed by Rosamund Wilmington's side; only—when "Violet Fane's" exquisite little volume of poems appeared, he sent me a copy with the corner of the page on which her "May Song" occurs, turned down. It is almost her prettiest poem, and runs:—

"A little while my Love and I,  
Before the mowing of the hay,  
Twined daisy-chains and cowslip-balls,  
And carrolled glees and madrigals,  
Among the hay, beneath the may,  
My Love (who loved me then!) and I.

"For long years now, my Love and I  
Tread severed paths to different ends;  
We sometimes meet and sometimes say  
The trivial things of every day;  
And meet as comrades, meet as friends,  
My Love (who loved me once) and I.

"But never more, my Love and I  
Will wander forth as once together,  
Nor sing the songs we used to sing  
In spring-time in the cloudless weather;  
Some chord is mute that used to ring,  
Some word forgot we used to say  
Among the hay, beneath the may,  
My Love (who loves me not) and I."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lady George Wilmynton is still one of the most prominent leaders of London society. She is never without one especially attentive and ever-attendant cavalier,



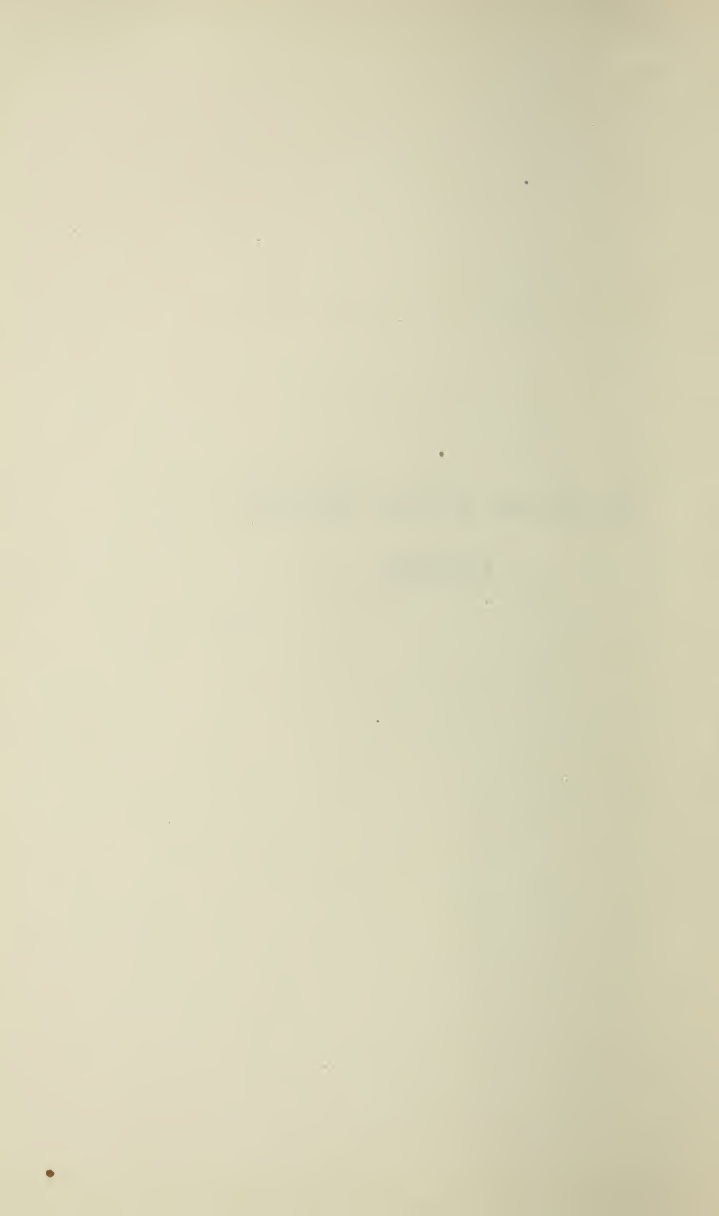
but those *who know*, say that she never has had again so unflagging and assiduous a servant as her *first*. And that was Sir Gervase Braybrooke.

“By-the-bye—whatever *has* become of him?”

THE END.



The Silence of Mrs. Cheriton's  
Children.



# The Silence of Mrs. Cheriton's Children

*A Story with No Middle to It.*

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## PART I.

### THE END OF THE STORY.

#### I.

"BUT who *was* their mother, anyhow?"

"My dear! How can I tell you what nobody knows? Of course they say—etc.—etc.—etc."

"But was she really as bad as they say?"

"Well, we don't know. She can't have lasted long, for I never met an Englishman who could tell me anything about her, or him, or them——"

"All I know about it," broke in a fourth lady, who had hitherto kept silence, "is what I've collected from a variety of sources, and it's all that is known by anyone. It seems that when Mr. Cheriton was quite a young man—etc., etc., etc."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh! how dreadful for those two poor children!" was the comment of the chorus.

At this moment a stranger was announced, and a discreet silence fell upon the occupants of Mrs. Van Talkin's drawing-room.

## II.

THE gaieties of the winter season were in full swing, and New York Society—with a capital S—had for some months past entirely ceased from any endeavor to save the few moments necessary for serious reflection, from the wreck of time amid the rapids of existence. We, that is to say Society—with a capital S—worked hard. We interviewed our tradesmen in the morn-

ing, we lunched at Delmonico's or at the Sapphic function known as a "ladies' lunch," we paid three or four calls and "looked in" at two or three receptions in the afternoon; then we dined and went to the opera—not to listen to the music, or to reward the hard-working mothers of families who catered for our amusement under the names of *Mdlle. Des Trois-Etoiles*—or as the case might be—with our perfunctory and inappreciative applause—but to chatter the same irresponsible *banalités* to the same uninteresting people whom we had met in the afternoon three or four times, and whom it was a matter of the completest indifference to us if we never met again!

Day after day we walked or drove on "the Avenue," and passed the same people again, greeting them with the same uninterested smile, or stopping to engage them in that style of conversation which Oscar Wilde has epigrammatically stigmatized as "the last resource of people who have nothing to say!" And, by-the-by, we

called this "Life." It was, I believe, the Bishop of Carlisle who defined life as "a potentiality for action, locomotion, and change, without the assistance of any external cause." This is a definition that has often recurred to me during a "busy" winter's day in New York, and I have often caught myself wondering vaguely whether the learned ecclesiastic founded his definition on an observance of Society in Gotham.

We—that is to say Society (with a capital S)—had attended our dinner-party, and had adjourned to the club for a quiet weed and a meditative pool, whilst our wife had got inside her ball-dress; and we had run together again, like the Athenians of old, in search of some new thing, to meet *chez Delmonico*, and play our parts in the little realistic drama known as "The Patriarch's Ball." I was a stray Englishman, and the exquisite hospitality of the historic eminence known as Murray Hill had provided me with a ticket for the ball, and would



have furnished me with a partner, had I desired one, for the cotillon.

Before that somewhat spasmodic dissipation commenced, however, I had, as a result of my recent arrival, been betraying a tendency towards "holding up the doorway," and therefore, when young Æselkopf Van Spook came up and offered to present me to somebody, I almost forgave him the hybrid intensity of his aggressive Manhattan ancestry, and strolled off round the room with him.

Sitting, for the moment alone, against a background of cotillon bouquets, in an angle of the room, I noticed, for the first time that evening, as we pursued our way round the floor, a young girl whose air of innocent enjoyment, and fresh coloring, bespoke, no less surely than the unrelieved snowiness of her costume, "the *ingenue*," the *débutante*, in fact, "the Bud." She arrested my attention while we were yet some yards distant from her, and, gripping Van Spook by the elbow, I said to him:

“Who is the fair maiden in white, over there?”

“Oh! that’s Miss Daphne Cheriton, and the girl just sitting down by her side is her twin-sister, Miss Josephine, ‘of that ilk.’ They’re both *debutantes* of this year, and this is their second ball. I’ll present you; old Cheriton’s worth five millions if he’s worth a cent, and you see before you his entire family. If you want to call on them, say you’ve heard of their father over *here*, and would like to make his acquaintance. Whatever you do, don’t say a word about *Mrs.* Cheriton, or in any way recognize the possibility of their ever having had a mother.”

“Goodness me! why——”

“Hush!—Miss Cheriton, will you allow me to introduce an English friend, Mr. Lyster? Mr. Lyster; Miss Daphne Cheriton;” and he was gone.

The Cheriton twins were dark and fair; of the two I think Miss Josephine was the more interesting. There was something in

the calm watchfulness of her grave, gloomy eyes, something about the expression of reserve that she habitually wore, which seemed to intensify the delicate pallor of her face, and produced an effect that was essentially indescribable. I was therefore more than pleased when, at the end of our waltz, she suggested that we should "sit somewhere cool for a moment." We chatted of men and things, general and individual, for a space—indeed time slipped by faster than I knew; and we were interrupted in our conversation by the sudden appearance of Mr. Cheriton, with an inquiry as to his daughter's supper arrangements. I offered myself with that true British promptitude which has been known to the vulgar as "cheek." Miss Josephine Cheriton presented me to her father, and we three went down to supper together.

Eugene Cheriton was a tall, dignified man of perhaps forty-three or four; I should have guessed his age at that from the erectness of his carriage and the quick-

ness of his manner and conversation, a quickness in which there was at times something almost brusque. At the first glance you would have given him another decade at least, for his hair was almost white, and in the lines round his mouth and eyes one could see the indications of acute suffering, mental or physical, or perhaps of dissipation. Still, beneath the affability of his manner and conversation, the cordiality with which he greeted me, and, so to speak, took me to his heart, I fancied I could detect a certain watchfulness, and a suppressed irritation which might be either the nervousness of the hypochondriac or the subdued ferocity of the caged brute. There are men who always impress me thus, and Eugene Cheriton was one of them.

We had been settled only a few moments when Miss Dapine Cheriton, who was seated at a neighboring table, came over and whispered a few words to her sister. Her father took advantage of the circumstance to say:

“I say, you children, you’re not going to stay for the cotillon.”

(Chorus) “Oh Papa!!”

“Well, I’m dead tired, and ought to have been in bed hours ago.”

“But, Papa,” said Miss Josephine, “it’s as much as our lives are worth not to stay; we’ve been engaged for weeks.”

“And even girls should meet their engagements,” added Miss Daphne.

“But—” began Cheriton.

“There’s no ‘but’ about it,” said Miss Daphne. “The Miss Cheritons are just going to stay right here,” and she skipped off.

“You see,” said Cheriton, turning to me with benign paterfamiliarity, “what a thing it is to be a father.”

“I see, on the contrary,” said I, totally forgetting Van Spook’s injunction, “what a thing it is to have *such* a father—or only a father to deal with. My last partner was taken home before supper by her stern mamma, and I don’t think that even Miss

Daphne Cheriton would prevail under such circumstances, once the chaperonial mind was made up."

In an instant what I had done flashed across me. Miss Josephine turned a little paler than usual, and looked across at her father in a manner half anxious and—it seemed to me—half contemptuous. Eugene Cheriton had bitten his lip and risen from the table, supporting himself by one hand resting upon it, whilst the other was pressed to his heart. Huskily stammering, "Excuse me," and bowing, in a manner which exhibited an effort of the supremest self-control, he left us; as he disappeared through the doorway, he passed his handkerchief across his forehead, and the play was over. I say "the play," because somehow or other, in the whole scene, it struck me that there was a false note somewhere—that it was too dramatic—not "good form."

Still, it was a very awkward thing to have done, a most unpleasant position to

have placed one'self in, and required some spontaneous tact for its solution. The tact of women comes out in rapid initiative, the tact of man lies in inaction; and in cases like the present—the man generally throws the difficulty immediately on to the shoulders of the woman—a tacit recognition of her superior ethical powers. Manlike, on this occasion, I merely looked across at Miss Cheriton interrogatively, and she, rising also, remarked:

“Shall we get back upstairs? It is very close here.”

As soon as we had left the elevator I said to her:

“You cannot conceive, Miss Cheriton, how grieved I am that a blunder of mine should have caused this *contretemps*. I have evidently wounded your father deeply, but I hope you will explain to him how innocent I was of any *intention* to wound.

“There is no need to discuss the matter, Mr. Lyster,” replied the girl, a faint tinge coming to her cheeks, and the pupils of

her eyes slightly contracting. "Of course you are in no way to blame; as a stranger to the city you could not know my father's peculiarity—his idiosyncrasy—in this respect. Any suggestion involving my mother always has that effect upon him; it is a subject on which the profoundest silence reigns, not only in our family, but among our friends. I am sorry to have to tell you this myself, but I feel it is better to get over it at once. Now, if you please, we will talk of something else.

We did so, and presently her partner for the cotillon came to claim her, and I went in search of Æselkopf Van Spook and an explanation.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, you see, my dear Mr. Lyster," said the young gentleman in question, in answer to my query as we drew up easy-chairs on either side of an anti-temperance table, in front of the fire that we found blazing in my rooms at the Everett House, "you are asking for information on a subject



about which I know as little as anybody else in New York; but what everybody knows I can tell you."

"Eugene Cheriton is an Englishman. He arrived in New York thirteen years ago with his twin daughters, who were then six years old. Immediately on his arrival the nurse who accompanied them from England was sent back, and thus the city was deprived of its only source of definite information. Cheriton seemed well off when he arrived—was so undoubtedly—and since his arrival the business to which he has devoted himself with unflagging enthusiasm has doubled or trebled his capital. Who his wife was or is—for no one knows whether she is alive or dead—is as much of a mystery to-day as it was on the morning of his arrival in the new world. It was understood that he had been the petitioner in a divorce case—not a sensational divorce case, but an ordinary vulgar affair disposed of in four lines by "The Times," and without any

redeeming features, sensational or romantic. Beyond this, thirteen years of assiduous female enquiry have only elicited the shadowy information that Cheriton, when very young, married a beautiful pauper over there: she was not, it appears, duly grateful, and after a couple of years or so, he was separated, leaving her the children in the hope, it is said, that they would reform her. They didn't. She went from bad to worse, and three years afterwards he had finally to sue for a divorce and take the children from her. The tragedy aged him as you see—for he's not much over forty—and from the day he arrived the word 'wife' or 'mother' upsets him, whilst if you allude to Mrs. Cheriton even indirectly he has a kind of fit. I saw you 'strike a snag,' as we say over here, whilst talking to him in the supper-room. Now you understand the position."

"Yes," I replied, "I understand the position," but I don't understand Cheriton."

"No, I should think not. No one does. He's about as deep as a well, and though the water is pure enough that comes out of it, in consequence of the fact that the bucket never gets far below the surface, I shouldn't be surprised if it were precious muddy down at the bottom."

"Eh!" I exclaimed, astonished principally at discovering in young Van Spook a penetration for which I had not given him credit.

"I mean," said he, "that *entre nous*, I believe that Cheriton is an infernal fraud."

"Shake!" said I, *à l'Américain*. We understood one another, and changed the conversation.

### III.

CALLING a few days later at No. 7 West 40th street, I was fortunate in finding the Miss Cheritons at home; and, improving an acquaintance which had promised, it seemed to me, such a pleasant future at its commencement, I soon became almost an

*habitué* in the Cheriton household. Certainly there was no house in which, during my stay in New York, I felt more thoroughly at home; and when I have said that, I have said almost everything a confirmed bachelor of six-and-thirty can say.

Of the twin girls, Miss Josephine was—if one may apply the expression to a twin—the elder. She seemed to be of a stronger fibre than her sister, and gave me the impression of being a charming *woman*, whilst Miss Daphne was nothing more or less than a singularly attractive *girl*. It was with the psychologically-elder twin therefore, that I felt most in sympathy, and I used to hold long, serious conversations with her whenever we found ourselves alone. I fancy that Mr. Cheriton encouraged our intimacy somewhat from a mistaken idea that we should eventually marry one another, though I may confidently say that such an idea never for one fleeting instant entered either of our heads. With Eugene Cheriton I never got below the

surface—the undisturbed and apparently undisturbable surface—of his calm social affability. He never alluded in any way to our first unhappy conversation, and during the five months that I frequented the Cheritons' house, I never heard the name of the late (?) Mrs. Cheriton mentioned, or her present or past existence even remotely alluded to. Nothing in the house suggested her:—nothing beyond young Van Spook's account, shadowy and unsatisfactory as it was, could I ever learn about the mother of the beautiful twins.

One day, the servant having admitted me in No. 7 W. 40th Street and disappeared incontinently (as had grown to be his wont), I entered the inner drawing-room unannounced, and caught Miss Josephine standing in the bay of a window looking intently at an open miniature-case which she held in her hand. I was coming up behind to surprise her, and discover her tender secret, when suddenly, her sharp ears catching my footfall, she turned,

started violently at seeing me, and, blushing crimson from her beautiful throat to the roots of her hair, shut the miniature-case with a snap. I held out my hand as if to take it, saying laughingly,

“Give it up—who is he?”

Quick as thought she put her hand behind her back, exclaiming as she did so: “Oh, Mr. Lyster, how you startled me!”

Her hand struck some piece of furniture, the case flew from it, and opening as it reached the floor, lay thus, face downwards. I stooped to pick it up, and the girl exclaimed rapidly:

“On your honor as a gentleman don’t look at that picture, Mr. Lyster!”

Of course I picked up the case, closing it as I did so; but having restored it, I began to chaff the girl about the original, wondering vaguely who the man could be who would risk encountering the expression “No” in those dark, solemn eyes. I saw that my *badinage* pained her, so I desisted, and we turned to other topics.

As I rose to go I saw something white on the floor, and stooping to pick it up, I saw that it was a picture of a woman. A cry of astonishment broke involuntarily from my lips as I stood looking at it, transfixed with amazement; the girl gave one look at it, and snatched it from my hand with an exclamation that seemed to vibrate with agony.

"In God's name," said I, hardly above a whisper, "who is that woman?"

"My mother."

#### IV.

NEARLY fourteen years before the events above recorded, Rex Stanhope, one of the dearest friends I had ever had in the world, an old school-fellow of mine, a gentleman *aux bouts des ongles*, and the soul of honor, went hopelessly, irretrievably, to the devil.

There was a woman in the case, though poor old Rex was as pure from any blame, as far as she was concerned, as an unborn

babe. She was an old, old love of his, and had thrown him over to marry another man. Had thrown him over, did I say? Hardly that. She had been forced by her people into an unwilling marriage with an older and richer suitor, and Rex had consecrated his life to a dumb, passionate regret for the "might have been." Five years after her marriage, however, his idol fell, shattered, stained, defiled; and Rex, no longer having any hope in the world, shocked out of all power of reflection, had abandoned every tie that bound him to his fair pure life, and, in trying to drown his grief in the mad dissipations of three capitals, fell from bad to worse, from worse to vilest, and finally died insane, in a garret of the Quartier Latin in Paris.

He had never told me the name of the woman he had loved and lost, but he had often shown me her picture, and this picture I found in the breast-pocket of the tattered coat that was made over to me by the *concierge* of the *maison-meublée*, wither I



be-took myself, accompanied by his brother, at the request of poor Rex's people, to bring the boy's body home. The portrait was a duplicate of the one I had just returned to Miss Cheriton, the portrait of her mother!

The whole story flashed across me again as we stood in the gathering twilight of the winter's afternoon—that woman's daughter and I. My brain whirled, and I could hardly remember where I was, so vivid was the picture of the past that the miniature had brought up to me. Josephine Cheriton's voice broke the silence, as we stood looking at one another:

“Mr. Lyster,” said she calmly, “did you know my mother?”

And as she spoke the light of a great Fear seemed to blaze from her eyes, fear for what my answer might be. Fortunately I had recovered myself sufficiently to reply:

“No, Miss Cheriton, I did not; upon my honor, I never saw her. My astonish-

ment was caused by the startling likeness that your mother's picture bears to that of a woman who crossed the path of a dear friend of mine—before your father was married even. Please think no more about it. I can imagine how painful this accident, and its impression upon you, must have been. I was mistaken in the dim light for a moment; believe me, I shall not refer to it again, and you will favor me very greatly by not doing so either. I shall leave you now; when next we meet I shall have forgotten all about it. You understand, we must have forgotten all about it."

And I left her, shaken for my part to the soul by the sudden revelation of the last act of the tragedy in which I had played a minor part nearly fourteen years before.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few nights afterwards I was dining with the Cheritons. When the ladies had left the table, the conversation turned on

the modern taste for Russian novels, and the analytical, almost morbid romances of the Tolstoï and Dostoievski school. We had been establishing comparisons and contrasts between the Russian novelist and Honoré de Balzac and Emil Zola, and in turn between their realism and psychology and that of Baring Gould and Edgar Saltus. Suddenly a young journalist remarked quite casually:

“It simply comes to this. The merely *narrative* form is practically a thing of the past; and just as the French novelist of the last half century has had but one direction in which to exercise his originality and his imagination, namely, the development and *dénouement* of what has been aptly called *l'éternel aduterè*, so, the English novel of to-day consists solely of a study of human nature, in which a woman's life is ruined by a man, or a man's life is ruined by a woman.”

As I fully expected, this was Eugene Cheriton's cue and he promptly began to

go through his artistic histrionic agony of recollection and remorse. I never believed in the genuineness of this performance, and after the revelation of a few days previously I felt disgusted by it, so I remarked out loud and quite distinctly to him:

“As, for instance, in the case of Rex Stanhope.”

The effect was electrical. The “performance” ceased abruptly, and for the rest of the evening Cheriton’s eyes wandered continually and nervously in my direction. I carefully avoided his glance, however, and as we rose to rejoin the ladies, young Van Spook, who was of the party, whispered to me:

“By Jove! Mr. Lyster, you’ve harpooned the fishing-frog this time!”

His remark requires explanation. I had, whilst dining with Mr. Van Spook a few weeks previously, elaborated to him my theory of “The Fishing-frog and the Flat-Fish,” which is a favorite one of mine, and is shortly as follows:

Men who have anything in their past lives or present occupations which, for reasons of their own, they wish to conceal — in a phrase, “men with histories,” are, to me, the fishing-frogs and the flat-fishes of society.

Both of these fishes are formed by nature to conceal themselves whilst on the war-path for either victims or food, but their plans of campaign are essentially and diametrically different.. The flat-fish sinks upon the sand of the ocean-floor, a “flap” or two disturbs enough sand around him to fall back and cover him up, with the exception of the one protruding eye which looks like a tiny pebble on the sand, but which watches for the unwary animalcule, whilst attracting it to its alimentary fate. The fishing-frog, on the other hand, lies upon the mud at the bottom of the water, and when anything approaches it, goes into violent convulsions, which hide him in a nebula of mud. If it is an enemy, the animal escapes under cover of the turgidity it

has produced; if it is a fishlet available for food, he throws out a multicolored "feeler," which the ill-fated creature lays hold of preliminary to being swallowed up; and if it is neither, the fishing-frog — like Brer Rabbit—merely "lays low."

*Verb sap*; Eugene Cheriton had struck me, the first time I saw him, as one of the fishing-frogs of society, and the discovery of his wife's identity, and the history which he concealed in theatrical mud — the history which I knew so well — confirmed me in my opinion.

On the day following this dinner-party Mr. Cheriton called upon me. It is needless to waste time and space in recording the game of words we played with one another, a game in which Cheriton had much to lose, and in which I held the winning cards. Be it sufficient to say that I closed the confabulation with these words:

"Our position is this, Mr. Cheriton. You have, for very obvious reasons,

imposed a silence with regard to their mother upon Mrs. Cheriton's children. It is not improbable that you and I are the only people in America — perhaps in the world — who know the true story of your poor wife's disgrace, and of the circumstances which led to and followed it. I entertain too warm a regard for your daughters, ever by any action or word of mine, to enlighten their happy ignorance of their mother's fall, or to lay bare to the world the deceit which you have practised for so many years. Unfortunately, your lie is not all a lie; but should it ever become so, should your daughters or the world ever come to know anything definitely reflecting on their mother's good name, I give you fair warning that they shall know to its minutest details the story of Eugene Cheriton, of Ethel Fethrestone — and of Rex Stanhope. This question is now at an end between us; pardon me if I refuse to enter into it any further, and now, good-morning."

He saw that my mind was made up, and he took his leave. A week later I started for San Francisco, *en route* for Japan and India and home. I kept myself informed, however, upon the subject of the Cheritons; and, as far as I can learn, Mr. Eugene Cheriton has kept religiously to his part of the bargain.

I never saw either him or his daughters again.



## PART II.

## THE INTRODUCTION TO THE STORY.

## I.

IN all Oriel College, there was no greater, no more universal favorite than Rex Stanhope. He was one of the best-looking boys in the university, and one of the most charming and *insouciant*. Among the wives and daughters of the "Dons" he was a sort of spoiled child, and, when, before the beginning of the long vacation of the year 18—, it became understood and realized that Rex, having taken his degree, was "going down," and that Oxford would know him no more, the expressions of regret that echoed from all sides were eminently sincere.

"Down" he went, however, flushed with his successes in the schools, and with the most exalted anticipations of his entry into

the merry, dazzling life in London society, to which, as youngest scion of one of the oldest families in the country, he eagerly looked forward. He knew by hearsay enough of "life" to be unalterably of opinion that the "bitters" thereof were sweet, or at most only mildly pungent, whilst its "sweets" were a matter of course! *Faites votre jeu, messieurs et 'dames; c'est à prendre ou à laisser! Trrrrwi!! Zero!* It's thirty-seven to one against it, but it's surprising how often it comes up in the *roulette* of "life." Pardon this digressive echo from Monte Carlo, and let us proceed.

Rex Stanhope made his entry into "society" at Lady Oswald's ball. Lady Oswald inhabited a beautiful old place in Fulham—I am talking of twenty years ago—hidden among giant elms and surrounded by a carefully-kept, old-fashioned garden, the whole protected by a high red-brick wall, which, at the same time, formed a warm back-ground for the giant hollyhocks and

sunflowers, the lupins and the gilly-flowers, which straggled in picturesque confusion over the borders, and protected her ladyship's old-time refuge from the gaze of the curious, who were at this time just beginning to seek light and air in the direction of West Kensington, of Putney, and of Barnes. Once a year Lady Oswald gave a great ball to which "everybody" went; and thither, panoplied in the magnificence of his newest *toilette*, went the Honorable Rex Stanhope, to make his first appearance in the "world," just ten days after he had bidden farewell as a scholar to his Alma Mater and Oriel College.

As yet his acquaintance was small, and, at the termination of a waltz, he stood, as is the habit of the unknown young man, in the great square hall, watching the long procession of dancers seeking the cool of the conservatories and the solitudes of the garden, to re-appear—or not, as the case might be—in time for the next dance. And as he stood, there appeared in the door-

way, leaning on the arm of her late partner, his first love—Ethel Fethreston. He had never seen her before; he had no idea who she was, but it seemed to him that he saw a “woman” for the first time. It was the story of Manon Lescaut and the Chevalier Des Grieux over again, and Rex Stanhope followed “the mistress of his soul” into the garden. For as she passed him their eyes had met; in his, a great wondering confusion, born of the new sensation of a beating heart and a hot, strained feeling at the throat; in hers, the calm triumph of a woman in the knowledge of her own peerless beauty, and the half-uncomfortable triumph of the not altogether heartless flirt—for Ethel Fethreston had been the most accomplished flirt of two seasons, and her victims, whom she thoroughly understood how to manage, were to be found in every drawing-room in London. Rex Stanhope, however, knew nothing of this—how should he, poor boy?—and as she bowed to him in passing, a great wave

of joyous triumph came over him, and he followed her into the garden in answer to her bow.

Ethel Fethreston was not very tall, nor had she, in common with many medium-sized women, the trick of holding herself so as to give an impression of dignity, if not of height. Her features were not very regular, but she had great, wondering, violet eyes, of the "ingenious *ingénue*" description, and a grand, passionate mouth and square, strong jaw that were strangely belied by her almost impertinent tip-tilted nose and her almost childishly enthusiastic manner. The whole, framed by her Titian-like burnt-sepia hair, produced an effect of torrid beauty which had turned many a head before Rex's; and there is no denying the fact that, when the beautiful Ethel flirted, she flirted with a will, and in a way peculiarly her own. Rex had every cause therefore to be as proud of his conquest as she of hers, and the novelty of the situation was essentially indescribable, as,

when the music of the next dance commenced, he met her returning to the ball-room, and, she transferring her arm to his, they had wandered off together into the discreet gloom of Lady Oswald's pleasure, just as if they had known one another for years.

'Twas she who broke the silence. Rex was too "inexperienced" to take up the cue with the *aplomb* which she had given it to him.

"You will think me very rude," said she, "for what I am going to say, but I must confess that though your face is perfectly familiar to me, I can't for the life of me remember where I've met you before."

"I am sorry to say," answered Rex, *gauche*-ly, "that we *never* met before."

"Oh, how dreadful! Please excuse my most stupid mistake. Will you take me back to the house; I suppose I've got a partner for the next dance, looking for me somewhere."

"Ah, no! don't go away. I know I've

no right to ask it, and it's awful cheek on my part—but—won't you let me introduce myself. I'm Rex Stanhope; my governor's Lord Lorrimer, you know; and your name is——?"

"Ethel Fethreston; but I ought not to tell you, ought I?"

"Of course you ought. I'm so lonely here; I don't know anybody; won't you take pity on me?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Ethel Fethreston's partners were always prepared to resign themselves to her non-appearance when they had a right to expect her, but on this eventful night they had a more uniformly bad time than usual. The butterfly was singed at last, and both she and Rex found themselves hopelessly in love with one another when her sister and her brother-in-law found them at last, still strolling round the grounds, and with much sternness of manner and acerbity of countenance, took her home in the small hours of the morning.

Next day, impelled by a desire to revisit the theatre of his joy of the night before, Rex took a hansom and drove down to call on Lady Oswald. Her ladyship greeted him with the words:

“Well, Mr. Stanhope, for a Lothario of your age you are really *du dernier chic*, monopolizing the one unmonopolizable beauty of my ball for the whole evening.”

“Why, how do you mean, Lady Oswald?”

“Only this, my dear boy, that if Eugene Cheriton hears of your performance of last night, there will probably be trouble.”

“And who is Eugene Cheriton?”

“Who is Eugene Cheriton? Why, bless the boy! he’s only the man who is to marry Ethel Fethreston this day fortnight!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Poor Rex! It was his first lesson, but he learnt it with a rapidity that did him credit. “Does she—does she love him?” asked he, a trifle huskily.

“Well, I’m afraid not, poor child!” answered Lady Oswald; “but he’s very well



off, and the Fethrestons haven't a penny to bless themselves with. Ethel lives with her sister and brother-in-law, and they treat her as a kind of upper servant, and no doubt, have made her accept Mr. Cheriton to get rid of her. It's a cruel thing, perhaps for her at present, but it will be all right in time; these *marriages de convenance* are generally the happiest after all. But I tell you all about it so that you mayn't fall in love with her yourself."

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, well! He was a younger son, without a chance against his rich rival, and he got back to his rooms almost blind in his agony of mind. He went to a florist's and bought a great bunch of Eucharis lilies, which he sent to her with a note—a little pathetic note—in which he told her he had heard of her engagement, and hoped she would be very, very happy, and would she accept these lilies and remember a fellow who was very grateful to her for the happy hours she had contributed to his life?—and

good-bye—he did not think it likely that they would ever meet again.

A couple of hours later his flowers were returned to him, and with them his note, across which, in the handwriting of her brother-in-law, was scribbled a hideous, insulting message.

Flung brutally from the altitude of his new-born hopes, Rex Stanhope for some days went about as one suddenly awakened from a dream half-ecstatic, half-nightmare, striving to distinguish the one from the other, and to recollect whether it had been wholly the one or wholly the other. During those days he tottered on the brink of a precipice, a precipice overhanging a grisly gulf of wanton dissipation, in which to seek to drown the memory of his false first love. Then his resolution was taken. He would become great, he would keep himself unspotted from the world, and make for himself a position that should make her regret him—should make her regret her hurry to marry the first rich man

who offered himself, regret the callous cruelty with which she had played with him for an evening, and then flung him from her as a disappointing toy.

## II.

And so Rex Stanhope, to whose appearance "in town" more than a few society matrons had looked forward, became a kind of hermit, devoting himself to his books and his manuscripts, travelling with avidity whenever the opportunity presented itself, appearing but seldom in the places where "his world" congregated to amuse itself, and never anywhere where there was the remotest possibility of his meeting Ethe Fethreston. Meanwhile, in the columns of "The Saturday Review" and "The Athenæum," in the pages of the "Contemporary Review" and the "Fortnightly," his name began to appear, until, four years after the evening of Lady Oswald's party, his was one of the names most prominent among those of the younger writers of the day.

Four years had, as I say, elapsed since that eventful night, and during that time he

had heard but seldom of Mrs. Cheriton, and what he did hear made his heart ache. Cheriton had not *married* his wife—few men do now-a-days; he had merely *collected* her as he would have collected any other specimen of bric-a-brac which nobody else has got or possibly can get, and having collected her, he was jealous, cold, calculating, cunning. Worse still, he was brutal, unfaithful, cruel to her, developing, one-by-one, all the meaner vices most likely to disgust a sensitive, refined woman; and Ethel Cheriton had ample opportunities of appreciating the magnitude of the crime her relations had committed in forcing her, and of the mistake she had made in allowing herself to be forced, into this unhallowed *marriage de convénance*. During the second year of their marriage she had become the mother of twin daughters; and it was this tender tie alone that kept her at the side of the man to whom she was—already —“something dearer than his dog, a little better than his horse.”

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For, from a light-hearted—nay, frivolous girl, Ethel Cheriton had become a high-minded, chivalrous woman. The sudden awakening in her soul of a genuine ideal love for Rex Stanhope, when it was “just too late,” had sobered her character, and made her steadfast in her determination to do her duty to this man who had bought the right to become the father of her children—her children, in whom all the wild love of her passionate nature had become concentrated. She knew that Rex was avoiding her, and she bowed her head before her punishment. She had never seen him since the ball. Better so, she thought, for after all what could an explanation have done? None at all; indeed, it might be dangerous; but this she never admitted, even to herself. Meanwhile, her friends, seeing her grow more miserable day-by-day, in spite of her still matchless, developed womanly beauty, urged her to take advantage of her ample cause for the step, and divorce the man who was making her

life a hell for her, before her children should be old enough to realize the state of affairs. But no; to their suggestions she turned an ever-deaf ear for her very children's sake; for their sake she listened in dull, cold resignation to the only too well founded scandals that attached themselves to her husband's name; and things were in this state in the winter of the year 18—.

One afternoon in early January, Rex started out to call on a friend in Queen's Gate, started out in the midst of a driving snow-storm, with many imprecations upon the necessity that drove him forth. Unfortunately he had bound himself by a promise to pay this call, which was one of *adieu*, and punctually at the hour he had named, he rang the bell at his friend's house. In answer to his enquiry the grave domestic replied:

“Not at home.”

“But,” replied Rex, naturally irritated that his comfortless expedition should have

been made in vain, "Mrs. —— told me she would be in at this time; will you tell her, if you please, when she returns, that ——?"

"Oh!" interrupted the servant, "Mrs. —— is expected home every moment, and left word that if any one called they were to be asked to wait."

Somewhat soothed by this assurance, Rex decided to remain; and he made his way upstairs to the drawing-room. Seated in a low arm-chair before the fire, also evidently waiting for Mrs. —— sat Ethel Cheriton! How little changed! And yet, how far more dazzlingly beautiful in her mature woman-hood than when he parted from her in those bygone years! After a momentary stupefaction, a rush of blood to the heart, an instant during which neither of them could speak, they had warmly shaken hands, and sitting on either side of the fire-place, found themselves calmly talking the *banalités* of every day as if their meeting was an ordinary matter of daily occurrence.

“So it was *you*, of all people in the world,” said Mrs. Cheriton, “whom Mrs. — was expecting. I came to call, more to shelter from the storm than anything else, and the butler told me that Mrs. — had left word that I was to wait. I was surprised, but said nothing, half-glad not to have to go away again, half-curious to find out who the anxiously expected guest *was*. So it is you who are the *cavalière* so *serviente* that we leave messages that he is not to be sent away!”

“No, Mrs. Cheriton, mine is merely a conventional visit of *adieu* before starting for Spain. As I am a hardworking son of toil, you know, I only call on people I really want to see, and therefore I let them know when I am coming.” He paused slightly, and then continued, “You, of all people on earth, should know that I am never likely to be any woman’s *cavalière* *sèrviente*.”

She said nothing for a few moments, but turned a shade paler, as, after what



seemed to be a momentary hesitation, she said:

"Mr. Stanhope, I am glad we have met at last—after all this time; there has always been something on my mind which I should have been glad to have spoken to you about. Before—before I was married—you were kind enough to send me some flowers one day—at least I heard so afterwards; and—my brother-in-law returned them to you. I could'nt—I could'nt write an apology for his rudeness, and—I always hoped some day to meet you and tell you I was sorry."

"You might have written one word to answer my note, in addition to, or rather, to soften, your brother-in-law's comment on it."

"Your note! What note?"

"Why, the one he returned with the flowers."

"I don't understand you; what do you mean?"

"Do you mean to say that you never

knew that I had written you a note with those flowers, conveying to you my wishes for your happiness."

"Never—never! Oh the cruelty of it! Ah; why did I never receive it! I should have prized it so." And she bent her beautiful head forward upon her hands.

Stanhope had risen, and had walked in his agitation to the window. Now he turned and advancing toward her drew his letter-case from his pocket. Taking from it a time-worn and oft-unfolded and refolded letter, he held it out to her, saying:

"Well, here it is."

She took it and said, hardly above a whisper: "And you have kept it ever since!"

"Yes," he replied, in a dry, strained voice, "I have kept it ever since as a lesson—as a punishment for my folly in believing that there was any truth in woman's love. Whenever I have been speaking to any fair young girl, or whenever any friend of mine has married, I

have taken it from my pocket-book, and said to myself, "That is the fruit *your* love has borne; you have pocketed that insult as its reward. Beware! do not sin again!"

"Oh Rex!"

He seized the poor imploring hands that were held out to him, and gazing deep through her eyes into her soul, he said sternly:

"Do you swear to me that you never knew I had written to you?"

"I swear it."

\* \* \* \*

When Mrs.——came in ten minues later, she was quite overjoyed at this strange meeting of old friends, and when it was time to go, she was sure Mr. Stanhope would see Mrs. Cheriton safely home.

Ah Rex! why did you not keep that pitiful token of your great, faithful love hidden away in your pocket-book? Had you done so you would have been now the brilliant man you gave promise of being, and Ethel Cheriton would have been home with her children.

## III.

Do not let the reader run away with any evil interpretation of the last paragraph. Specifically, Rex Stanhope had no hand in the fall of Ethel Cheriton; but had they never met she might have gone on in the old painful groove, upheld by her stern sense of duty. But alas! having refound her old—her only *love*, a man of refinement, of cultivation—in a phrase, a scholar and a gentleman, her loathing of the ignorant sensualist to whom she was tied became the more intense, the more violent, by contrast. Her new born, constant intercourse with Rex Stanhope, an intercourse of sympathy in which no word of love was ever breathed, turned her thoughts continually in the direction of the terrible future, as contrasted with the exquisite “might-have-been;” and at last one day she announced to Rex her intention of obtaining from her husband a formal separation—not a divorce; that, said she, would rebound in after years on her children.

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But she had quite made up her mind no longer to bear the continued agony of a life which, always revolting to her, had become doubly so since that winter's afternoon. It was useless to attempt to dissuade her; she had the right on her side undoubtedly; and one day, when, in the course of a quarrel on some point concerning the children, Eugene Cheriton had struck her to the ground in his drunken fury, she felt that the last straw had been added to her load, and—separated formally from the man who had “collected” her, she took a little flat in Kensington, and devoted herself thenceforward to her children — her children, on whose account alone she had refrained from obtaining a definitive divorce.

What of Rex Stanhope? He took the only course possible under the circumstances. Sufficiently wise in the ways of the world to know what he would bring upon the woman he loved, if he allowed his intimacy with her to continue, now that she

no longer lived beneath her husband's roof, and knowing moreover the weakness of human nature too well to exclude himself and her from its penalties, he announced his intention of travelling; and, in spite of the entreaties of Ethel and the remonstrances of his friends, he started on a tour of the world that should occupy some years at least.

No one knew the cause of his self-imposed exile, for in his horror of compromising Ethel, he had kept their affairs religiously to himself, maintaining before the world merely a footing of ordinary social acquaintanceship. One man alone knew anything at all about it, and even he did not know the name of the woman who had come thus into his friend's life, though Rex told him, step-by-step, the circumstances which had led him to the course he had adopted. This man was myself, Dick Lyster, a school and college friend who was more than a brother to Rex, the only man who was in a position to remonstrate

with him on the step he was taking, in severing all his newly-cemented ties to the old country, in giving up his brilliant prospects as a writer and politician, and in expatriating himself at four-and-twenty for the sake of some—to me, the mentor,—unknown woman.

“It’s no use arguing, old man,” Stanhope had said in answer to my remonstrances; “if I had not come back into her life, if I had not committed the cursed folly of showing her that her image had never left my breast, she would never have left her husband. Now that she has taken the step, unless I efface myself we must be thrown more intimately together than ever, and then—well, we are only human creatures after all! No! I shall go, and you must admit that I am doing right. My memory, and the memory of the sacrifice I have made to her of my life, will be the sheet-anchor of her womanly purity, and in giving her an ideal, an ideal that I know that I could not keep up if I were always

by her side, I am making but a very meagre reparation for the wrong I have done her and her children, by causing indirectly this separation."

It was chivalrous, it was Quixotic, it was absurd; but his mind was made up, and Rex disappeared. People asked after him sometimes, and the answer was always:

"Oh, he's still idling round the world. He didn't stick to his ambition long; no doubt there's a woman in it somewhere!"

#### IV

How continually, continually we hear women envy the position of men. How often it has occurred to all of us to hear a woman say, "I wish I were a man!" and though we smile and tell them they don't know what they are talking about, if we stop to think for a moment, how absolutely they have reason! And why should we condone, pardon, and, if the truth must be told, rather admire in man, what we loathe and condemn in woman? Is it worse in



woman to be impure, than it is in man? Is it worse in her than in him to be unchaste, to be unsexed, to be contemptible? If, as is generally admitted, woman is the weaker vessel, in God's name is it not a thousand-fold more vile in man, whose intellect is the stronger, as a rule, to yield to the weakness of a moment, than it is in woman? If a man and a woman sin equally together, why is it the woman alone who is blamed, on whom *alone* a *lasting* stigma rests? The sin has been born of the superior strength, mental and physical, of the man over the woman. Is it not he that should be chastised rather than she? for his is the initiative, and his, as a rule, is the action. In a joint crime of whatever kind, it is always the woman who is commanded and directed by the man; but, in the subsequent record, it is always *he* who had been brought to grief by *her* and not her by him. She is a "fiend," an "adventuress," whilst he is only a weak man! Oh! it is horrible, it is *lâche*, it is *infâme*!

And how infinitely worse than this is the case which occurs every day, the case in which the marital tie has been severed, either by separation or by divorce. Is it not always the woman—to our shame be it said—on whom the blame invariably falls? A man is cruel, brutal, unfaithful, to his wife; she bears it as long as she can, and at last, driven to the step in self-defence, or in defence of her innocent children, she is compelled—with the fullest approval of all who know the circumstances of the case—to sue for a separation, or even for a divorce. For a week—perhaps, if she is lucky, for a month—she is sympathized with and supported, and then people who know nothing at all about it begin to whisper among themselves. “Who is she?” “Oh, that’s the beautiful Mrs. ——. Poor thing! you know she had trouble with her husband.”

Second stage, “*That!* Oh! that’s Mrs. —; she’s separated from her husband, you know.” “Oh!”

Third stage, “Ah! Mrs. —? Yes;

Mr. — was a cousin of the So-and-so's; they don't live together. Shall I introduce you?" "Well, thanks, I think not. One has to be so careful now-a-days."

Fourth stage, "Is that the Mrs. — who was separated from her husband?" "Yes." "How was it?" "Oh, he was a happy-go-lucky sort of a fellow, and they didn't get on. No doubt there were faults on both sides." "Ah!"

Fifth stage, "Who's the man so devoted to Mrs. —, the one who was divorced, or something, you know?" "Well, I don't know, but a *very* old friend I believe." "Oh!"

Sixth stage, "Well, he couldn't stand it any longer, and had to get rid of her; they say he's never got over it."

Seventh stage, "Why did he let her keep her children with her?" "Well, you know, he thought that they might perhaps keep her straight, but I'm afraid, etc., etc., etc."

And so it goes on, on, on, *vires que ac-*

*quirit cundo*, like a snowball; and at last the victim, forsaken by all the friends who, greedy of some new sensation, espoused her cause so warmly at the first, finds herself relegated to the society of fast men and *déclassées* women, and in nine cases out of ten takes up willingly the rôle that is thrust upon her. The end comes in her making a single slip, wearied out and sick at heart at being pointed at as guilty of sins of which she is spotlessly innocent. She sees other women around her leading happy, or apparently happy, and brilliant lives; the "set" into which she has become transplanted, and in which she seems to have taken root, think her unnecessary "principles" rather contemptible than otherwise—like the fox who lost his tail; she finds herself deserted and despised; and one day, maddened by her hopeless yearning for love and friendship —

\* \* \* \*

Such was the history of Ethel Cheriton. Cheriton, after his wife left him, had, with

the cunning of the serpent, led a life that was discretion itself, watching her the while with a ceaseless vigilance, and keeping himself informed of her every movement. At last his opportunity came. For the sake of her children she had not divorced *him*; now he turned upon her ruthlessly, and petitioned against her for the divorce, the indignity of which she had spared him; and one day, Rex Stanhope, slowly accomplishing the last stages of his journey round the world, took up the *Times* in the English Club in the Rue de Pera at Constantinople, and read:

PROBATE, DIVORCE AND ADMIRALTY  
DIVISION.

BEFORE THE PRESIDENT.

*Cheriton vs. Cheriton and De Torriano.*

“This was a suit by Eugene Cheriton, a gentleman of independent means, for the dissolution of his marriage with Ethel Cheriton, whose maiden name was Fethrestone, on account of her misconduct with Ippolito

de Torriano. Dr. Bayard appeared for the Petitioner. *There was no defence.*

"The Petitioner was married to the respondent in 18—, and they lived together up to May, 18—. There are two children of the marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Cheriton lived happily in the earlier portion of their married life, but in 18— he had reason to complain of her conduct and quarrels ensued between them. In May, 18—, they separated, he securing to her by deed an annuity of —, which he has since paid quarterly. In June last, Mrs. Cheriton and the correspondent, who is a singer, were served with citations in this suit.

"Decree *nisi*, with costs against the correspondent, *the petitioner to have the custody of the children of the marriage.*"

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This is what Rex Stanhope, after two years, during which he had heard no word about the Cheritons, read in the Club at Pera. That night, for the first time in his life, he played high and drank recklessly. In the early morning he was sent home to

his rooms insensible; but for weeks he sank lower and lower, striving in vain to drown his agony in the worst, and to him hitherto absolutely unknown, forms of dissipation. The sudden change shocked and alarmed his friends in the English colony at Constantinople; and at last, though with great difficulty, they persuaded him to turn his face homewards. He stopped in Vienna, where the same thing recommenced, and he had to fly from the Austrian capital at dead of night to escape the consequences of the part he had taken in some drunken riot, and arriving in Paris, he sank rapidly to the nethermost abysses of infamy. All this time we, in England, knew nothing of it, for no one knew his address: we expected him home almost daily, but alas—he never came!

One morning his eldest brother received from Paris a dishevelled package containing an account of poor Rex's last days, and an almost undecipherable letter addressed to me by the dead boy, containing an ac-

count of his first and last meeting with Ethel Cheriton, whom still he did not *name*, bitterly reproaching himself with having caused her fall, remorse for which crime doubtless, had driven him to his terrible end. During a lucid interval at Constantinople, when he had been intending to kill himself, he had made a will leaving what little property he had to the woman, who, forsaken by the man who had completed her fall, was living in misery abject and shameful in one of the slums of Pimlico. This will, carefully sealed up, he enclosed, that his brother might carry its provisions into operation; and, by the consent of his father, who did not wish to court publicity in the affair by contesting a will made under such circumstances, this was done by the family solicitors.

God help her, poor girl! Without this meagre sustenance I tremble to think what would have become of her.

I went over to Paris with his brother to bring home his body, and there, for the



first time, I saw the picture, the duplicate of which I recognized as being that of Mrs. Cheriton, years after, in far away New York. We hushed matters up so far as it was possible; and our task was rendered easier by the fact that Mrs. Cheriton's husband and children had left for America, and the will was made out in her maiden name of Fethrestone, a name which she had now resumed. Thus it happened that, though I alone knew the story of Rex Stanhope's blasted life, I never knew the name of the woman more sinned against than sinning, but whose story is, alas! such a common one.

With all his strength of character, Rex Stanhope committed one folly, and it ruined one of the most promising careers in England: in the midst of all her self-devotion and grand forbearance for her children's sake, Ethel Cheriton made one slip, of which her dastardly husband took advantage to found upon it his sham respectability. There was only one way in which to stifle all account of the ruin he had

wrought in two lives, each a thousandfold purer and better than his own, and that was to impose a silence like that of the grave upon Mrs. Cheriton's children.

**THE END.**

















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